

THE MONTENEGRIN-ALBANIAN CAMPAIGN IN 1916:
THE LAST SUCCESSFUL UNILATERAL CAMPAIGN
OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

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by

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ABSTRACT

THE MONTENEGRIN-ALBANIAN CAMPAIGN IN 1916: THE LAST SUCCESSFUL UNILATERAL CAMPAIGN OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY, by Major István Simai, 140 pages.

The thesis examines what factors prevented the Austro-Hungarian forces from capturing all of Albania in 1916. The Montenegrin-Albanian campaign was executed unilaterally by Austro-Hungarian forces but in a joint environment. In November 1915 the Central Powers decisively defeated the Serbian Army, and Austria-Hungary was keen on continuing the Balkan offensive. This campaign consist of three elements; the Montenegrin operation, the Albanian operation and the supporting naval operation. Montenegro was a small country, but its mountainous terrain and fierce soldiers made their defeat challenging. The decisive factor was the use of artillery and a good plan. Montenegro fell in twelve days. The naval operation designed to prevent the Serbian Army's evacuation failed due to the passivity of the Austro-Hungarian Navy's leadership. During the Albanian operation the advancing troops had extreme difficulties with the terrain, weather and the supply. As the forces reached the Vojusa River, the Austro-Hungarian forces logistically culminated. The frontline stabilized for two years. The campaign was successful, although many opportunities were lost. As a consequence, the Serbian forces were rebuilt, later decisively influencing the Balkan theatre. Furthermore, the Entente Powers built up the Otranto barrage, a naval blockade, disrupting the Central Powers' submarines lines of communication.

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ACRONYMS

AOK	Armee Oberkommando [Army Central Headquarter] The Austro-Hungarian General Staff
K.K.	Kaiserlich Königlich [Imperial-Royal] It was the title of the Austrian (Cisleithania) units, ministries.
K.u.K.	Kaiserlich und Königlich [Imperial and Royal] It was the title of the Austro-Hungarian common Army, Navy and ministries.
M.K.	Magyar Királyi [Royal Hungarian] It was the title of the Hungarian (Transleithania) units, ministries.
METT-TC	Mission, Enemy, Terrain and Weather, Troops available, Time, and Civil considerations (Mission variables)
POW	Prisoner of War

ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Balkan theatre has received little attention from historians. No doubt the outcome of the World War One was decided on the Western Front but there were many other significant events, which influenced this outcome. It was absolutely true for the Balkans. This region provided the spark that ignited World War One and the collapse of the Central Powers. In addition the Balkans offers unique insights into application of joint forces, combined arms and maneuver.

The Austro-Hungarian campaign in Montenegro and Albania was the last of the series of Central Powers victories from the summer of 1915 to spring 1916. In some circles, there is a popular belief that the Serbian, and the Montenegro and Albania Campaigns were part of an overarching campaign; however this paper will prove that they were in fact separate and distinct campaigns. The Serbian Army was defeated and slowly retreated towards Albanian ports and through them to secure lands to reorganize. Two of the major objectives of the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign were capturing the Serbians and securing the borders of the Dual Monarchy. Austria-Hungary had chosen to launch a unilateral campaign, since German forces left the Balkan Peninsula by end of 1915.¹

¹ Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, and Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, vol. 6 [Austro-Hungarians Last War, 1914-1918] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 599.

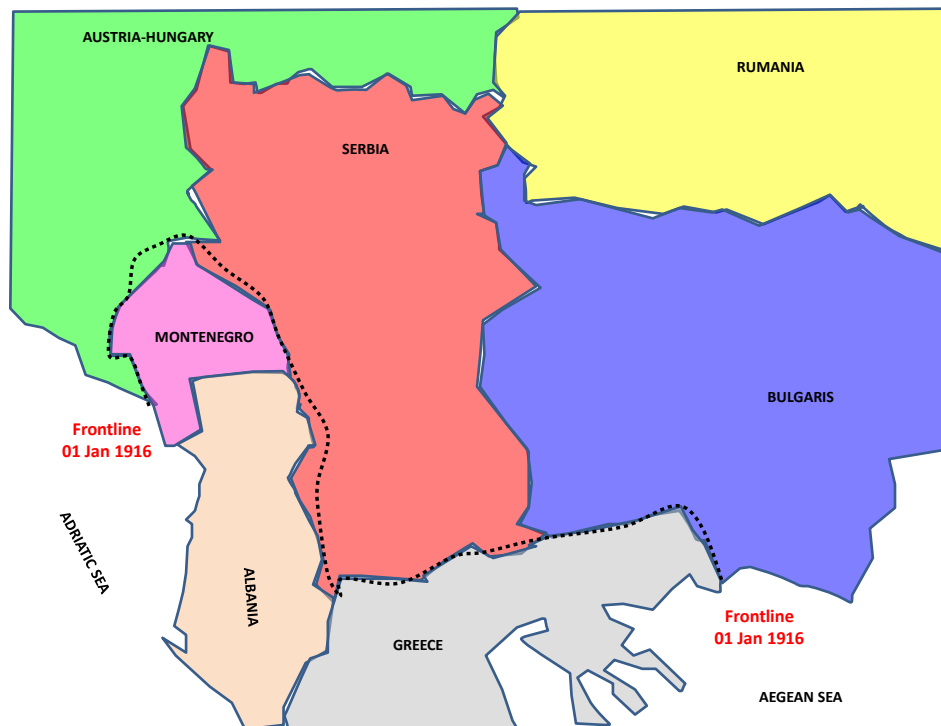


Figure 1. Situation in first part of January 1916

Source: Created by author, data from Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehn, Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, vol 6. Beilage 3 [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918, vol 6. Annex 3] (Wien, Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933).

The 3rd Army, under the command of General Hermann Baron Kövess von Kövessháza was designated to execute the land offensive supported by a naval operation. As an ally to Serbia, Montenegro opposed the Central Powers since the first day of the war and caused problems securing Austria-Hungarian southern borders. The Montenegrin operation lasted seven days and finally Montenegro capitulated.² Albania had not real

² Tolnai, *A világháború története 1914-1918 VIII. kötet* [Tolnai, The history of the World War 1914-1918] (Budapest: Tolnai nyomdai műintézet és kiadóvállalat RT, 1934), 8:6.

organization as a state enabling Serbia and Montenegro to capture Albania in June 1915. This factor explains why only separate Serbian, Montenegrin, and Italian units opposed the Austro-Hungarian forces in the Albanian operation. Due to the failed sea operation the Serbian Army successfully evacuated to Korfu and later caused many problems for the Central Powers from the Salonika front. Italian forces were able to secure the key ports of Albania and sent their expeditionary forces. Durazzo, the northern Albanian port was captured by Austria-Hungary but Valona and the southernmost 10 percent of Albania remained in the control of Italy.³ For the purpose of this paper only the Italian role, as one Entente Powers, will be examined, in spite of the fact that Italian forces later joined the Salonika front under General Maurice Sarrail to fight in Albania against the Central Powers during this timeframe. As a result of the campaign, the southern border of Austria-Hungary was secured and the Entente Powers were forced out of almost the whole of the Balkans. A secondary effect of the campaign was also promising; it provided secure ports for the naval forces, primarily submarine, of the Central Powers operating in the Mediterranean Sea. The campaign failed to reach its final goal of securing the whole of the Balkans. The southern parts of Albania also provided a good bridgehead for Italy to set up a naval blockade of the Otranto-Straits. In conclusion this campaign did not reach its final objective. The Austro-Hungarian offensive culminated due to the exhaustion of the troops, the extended logistical supply lines, the conflict with Bulgaria, and the resistance of the Italian forces. These facts provide the broad context and setting for this thesis.

³ Ibid., 14.

By using a chronological approach, this paper will answer the main question “What factors prevented Austro-Hungarian forces from capturing all of Albania in 1916?” Chapter 2 provides the background and examines of the strategic context of the campaign within World War I seeking the answer the following supporting research questions: “What issues influenced the Entente and Central powers regarding the Balkan and the Mediterranean theatres from both land and sea prospective?” “Why did the Central Powers not cooperate with each other?” Chapter 3 examines the operational environment utilizing the mission variables (Mission, Enemy, Terrain and Weather, Troops available, Time, and Civil considerations) (METT-TC) and describes the starting situations of the campaign. The examination of the operational environment focuses on the following supporting research questions: “What difficulties did prevent the attacking force fast advance?” “What did lead to the exhaustion of the troops and to the logistical problems?” “How did this difficulties influence the campaign?” Chapter 4 examines the Montenegrin operation. The supporting research questions are. “How did the Austro-Hungarian Navy support the land operations?” “How did the Austro-Hungarian Forces fail to prevent the Serbian forces from withdraw from Albania?” “How did this operation set the conditions for the following Albanian campaign?” Chapter 5 examines the Albanian operation and will support all research questions by using the historical events. The primary research questions are. “How did the Austro-Hungarian offense slow down and finally stop?” “Why the Italian forces did not counter-attacked from their position?” The last chapter summarizes the research questions highlights what a modern military professional learn from this campaign and concludes by providing recommendations.

Based on these sources, through the research questions stated above, this thesis will answer “What factors prevented the Austro-Hungarian forces from capturing all of Albania in 1916?” The thesis will provide the reader a unique insight into a campaign, which successfully employed the joint operations. The Austro-Hungarian offensive was stopped due to lack of the cooperation among the Central Powers, the long negotiation about the Montenegrin surrender, and the extended logistical supply lines.

CHAPTER 2

STRATEGIC BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Montenegrin-Albanian campaign started in a strange political and military environment. The Central Powers were victorious in almost every front, but the cooperation between the member states was precarious and often made a bad situation worse. The Entente Powers had many difficulties in 1915 but their cooperation was improving and their ability to acquire resources and generate combat power grew over time. A detailed holistic description of the entire political and military situation in 1915 is beyond the scope of this paper. Discussion focuses on the Mediterranean Theater, much closer to the Balkans and answers the following supporting questions:

“What issues influenced the Entente and Central powers regarding the Balkan and the Mediterranean theatres from both land and sea prospective?”

“Why did the Central Powers not cooperate with each other?”

Central Powers

The prelude of the Central Powers started in 1879 when a Dual Alliance was signed in Vienna between Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary.⁴ This alliance remained in effect until the end of World War One. The Alliance was re-negotiated and resigned every five years so it followed the changing political situation. The effect was a unified countenance on the political scene against other Great Powers. It was the case in

⁴ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, *A Világháború, különös tekintettel Magyarországra és a Magyar csapatok szereplésére* [Royal Hungarian Military Archives, The World War, considering the role of Hungary and the Hungarian units] (Budapest: A stádium sajtóvállalat részvénytársaság, 1928), 1:13.

every major conflict in the pre-war period. The alliance was expanded by Italy in 1882, when it was renamed the Triple Alliance.⁵ This expansion was not very effective while Italy had territorial demands towards Austria-Hungary and both countries considered the Balkans as their own sphere of influence. This alliance was nullified in 1915 when Italy joined to the Entente Powers. Despite the signed alliance, Italy did not support Germany in the Moroccan crisis, and only after serious negotiation supported Bosnia-Herzegovina's annexation by Austria-Hungary. Based on the defensive purpose of the alliance Italy refused to join the Central Powers and declared neutrality at the beginning of the war. The Triple Alliance was extended later. Rumania signed an alliance in 1881 with Austria-Hungary, which in 1883 became an annex of the Triple Alliance.⁶ The relation with Rumania was similar to that of Italy so they were not considered a loyal ally. By 1914 a relative balance of power formed between the two opposing alliances considering the force ratio.

When Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, massive diplomatic actions were initiated. Germany offered its loyal support, and Italy was not in a position to oppose the ultimatum. As soon as World War One broke out the Dual Alliance worked well but the Triple Alliance did not. Italy and Rumania declared neutrality and waited until a time came to intervene on the side that best suited their interests. The force ratio became negative for the Central Powers as soon as the War begun. Two of the former allies declared neutrality and could become worse if they join the Entente. The main political

⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶ Ibid.

goal of the Central Powers was to convince the other two members of the Triple Alliance to join or at least stay neutral.

The first country who to join the Central Powers was Turkey on November 5th, 1915.⁷ Turkey was important to the Central Powers because they could deter the forces of Great Britain, threaten the Suez-Canal, deny the access to Russia through the Dardanelles and occupy Russian forces in the Caucasus. Turkey, as a leading nation of Muslims, provided the possibility of a unified religious conflict that would endanger the British colonies in North Africa, Middle East and India.⁸ The first year of the war there was no real Line of communication from Germany to Turkey. Rumania allowed only minimal support and Serbia held the other possible way to supply Turkey. The solution was Bulgaria.

Bulgaria joined to the Central Powers on 14 October 1915.⁹ The precondition of this development was an agreement between Turkey and Bulgaria. Bulgaria demanded territories which had lost in the Second Balkan Wars while Turkey was keen on keeping Adrianople. Finally the agreement said Bulgaria would receive 3000 square kilometers west and north of Adrianople while Turkey kept the city and everything east of Evros River.¹⁰ A divide still existed between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, but after the Austro-Hungarian troops captured Belgrade, the Germans North-East Serbia, and the

⁷ Szíjj Jolán, *Magyarország az Első Világháborúban Lexikon* [Hungary in the World War One Lexicon] (Budapest: Petit Real, 2000), 679.

⁸ Tolnai, 4:252.

⁹ Szíjj Jolán, *Magyarország az Első Világháborúban Lexikon* [Hungary in the World War One Lexicon] (Budapest, Petit Real, 2000), 743.

¹⁰ Tolnai, 7:207.

Bulgarian's Nis on 7 November 1915 the land lines of communication was established to Turkey.¹¹ Bulgaria was also hostile towards all of her neighbors. The declaration of war helped to defeat the Serbians but also accelerated the Entente support in Rumania and Greece.

Central Powers general situation in December 1915

In general, 1915 was the year of the Central Powers. Germany successfully held the western front against the French and British forces and still maintaining the ability to shift major forces to the Eastern Front. On the 2nd of May the Central Powers executed a successful penetration through the Russian lines near a small Galician city, Gorlicze.¹² This victory was devastating to the Russians. The frontline retreated hundreds of kilometers and finally stopped on the Austro-Hungarian border–Brest-Litovsk-Riga line. A further advance was prevented when the British initiated the second battle of Artois and the Italians declared war. The victory in the Eastern front convinced Bulgaria to joint to the Central Powers, furthermore prevented Romania from entering to the war on the Entente side. The Italian treason was not a surprise to the Central Powers but obviously was not a good development and not in a good time period. The new battlefront required manpower and resources, but the Central Powers were short on both of these resources. Turkey fought on four different fronts and only the Dardanelles situation was evaluated as good. The opened lines of communication provided the needed war materials but the successful fight required time to rebuild the army. The last success was the Serbian

¹¹ Ibid., 254.

¹² Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 9: 69.

campaign, when finally the Central Powers captured all territory of Serbia. This development finally secured the avenue of approach from Constantinople to Budapest and to Vienna, but the threat still existed while Montenegro was not defeated.

Germany general situation in December 1915

The Austro-Hungarian performance in the first year of the Great War disappointed the German leadership. The Germans felt their ally needed to contribute more and not to solely rely on them for help on every front. This was against the idea of the Dual Alliance. The German leadership handled the Dual Monarchy more and more as a junior partner. The Austro-Hungarian pride, of course, did not allow that but openly stating it as unsatisfactory showed the weakness of this relation. On the other hand, every German knew the only reliable ally was the Dual Monarchy. Naturally every person handled this situation differently, but Erich von Falkenhayn was the Chief of General Staff in Germany who disregarded the good relations. His personal opposition towards Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of General Staff also weakened the cooperation. He considered the Western Front decisive and von Hötzendorf the Eastern Front. Von Falkenhayn's view was in the Balkan Peninsula that, after the land connection between Germany and Turkey was secure, the Austro-Hungarians and the Bulgarians could deal with Montenegro and Albania and he wanted to contain the Entente Forces in Salonika. Those divisions could worry him if they would appear in the Western Front.¹³ His lack of trust towards the Austrians showed clearly when German troops were ordered to leave the Balkans. No plans were shared with the Austro-Hungarian general staff; they

¹³ Szíjj Jolán, 109.

just declared “we’ve done our part.” This act initiated the separate Austro-Hungarian preparation against Montenegro and Albania and the two chiefs of general staffs did not speak to each other for months.

The German relationship with the Bulgarians was interesting. Bulgaria was considered a close ally of Russia until the Second Balkans War. Until that time, Germany did not support Bulgaria at all, not even during the Treaty of Bucharest. Bulgaria though was open to any possibility to regain its lost territories, so when the Germans initiated the negotiation they found open ears. Bulgaria joined the Central Powers at the right time and right place. Their performance was good; they defeated the Serbians in many battles and even the combined French-British Corps in the battle of Krivolak. Understandably the Germans were satisfied with the Bulgarians and supported them as much as they could. Such was the case when Austria-Hungary complained about the Bulgarians occupying Serbian territories, where Bulgarians initiated the buildup of their civilian administration. Those complaints were not accepted in Berlin, and the territorial change, which was made under German litigation favoring the Bulgarians. Germany did not have an exact picture about the future of the Balkan countries, but they wanted to keep the balance and King Ferdinand was keen on keeping the occupied territories. Four cities were in the focus of this conflict, Pristina (Serbia), Prizren (Serbia), Elbasan (Albania), and Djakova(Montenegro).¹⁴ This decision was received as a victory in Sofia, and as a defeat in Vienna, although it was a compromise. Austria-Hungary received Djakova and

¹⁴ Pollmann Ferenc, Hadtörténelmi közlemények, *A szövetséges együttműködés nehézségei, Az Osztrák-Magyar-Bulgár ellentétek Koszovó ügyében 1916 tavaszán* [Military History Periodicals, The difficulties of the cooperation among allies, The conflict between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria in case of Kosovo in spring 1916], 1995/4, Pécs, 30.

Elbasan, but withdrew her forces from Pristina and Prizren. This decision clearly created a competition between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria for the control of the Balkan territories.

Imperial Germany was keen on being a world power and extended its presence to all major seas. That included the Mediterranean Sea where a cruiser division was detached. They wanted to operate with the combined Austro-Hungarian-Italian fleet, but it was never materialized due to the Italian neutrality. That cruiser division sailed to Constantinople and became part of the Ottoman navy.¹⁵ German strategists knew the importance of the Suez-Canal and the Mediterranean Sea line of communications and soon implemented a new way to disrupt it. Submarines were transported by rail to Austro-Hungarian ports where they were assembled and launched. By the end of 1915 five German submarines stationed in Austro-Hungarian ports and many others were deployed to Turkey. Those submarines had significant role in the overall campaign against the Entente supply lines. Germany had built submarine bases inside Turkey, but those lacked the industrial capacities only available in Austro-Hungarian ports. To continue a successful naval campaign an easy passage through the Strait of Otranto was essential. The passage was not in danger in 1915, so it did not have as much significance or strategic impact as the land offensive on the western front. The German submarines however supported the Austro-Hungarian naval operations during the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign.¹⁶

¹⁵ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 4:403.

¹⁶ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete* [The Austro-Hungarian Navy] (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2001), 53.

By the end of 1915, Germany relocated all of their troops from the Balkans, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had an opportunity to increase its power and prestige; showing good combat performance.

Austria-Hungary's general situation in December 1915

Austria and Hungary established their empire on June 8th, 1867. It was a dualist country that was in the last stage of an almost five hundred years political fight. The creation of Austria-Hungary did not end the confrontation between the two nations, but turned to other scenes. The two countries were considered almost independent, the Kaiser/King linked together the two half and the common ministries. The common ministries were foreign affairs, defense and their supporting finance. One minister was always a Hungarian, but never the Defense Minister. The biggest issue was the common expenses, which was a 70/30 ratio between Austria and Hungary in 1870 and every 10 years this quota was re-examined.¹⁷ Each Parliament must have voted the yearly budget, which was always a huge argument. The compromise provided huge influence for the Hungarian parliament, which slowed down the reaction time of the whole Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The situation of the Armed Forces was also interesting. Three levels existed among the forces; each had its own unique characteristics. The first line units were part of the common army, called Kaiserlich und Königlich (Imperial and Royal), as an often used acronym K.u.K. The K.u.K. Army represented the unifying factor of the whole

¹⁷ Kozari Mónika, *A Dualista Rendszer (1867-1918)* [The Dualist System (1867-1918)] (Budapest: Pannonica Kiadó, 2005), 28.

empire. This Army had the best recruits and the best materials of the Empire. The common army had every combat arm; and Corps and above organizations.

The K.K. Landwehr in the Austrian half of the Empire; and the Magyar Királyi Honvédség (Hungarian Royal Defense Forces) in the Hungarian half of the Empire represented the second echelon. These units also had their own recruits and their units existed during peacetime as well. The differences significantly decreased by the eve of the World War One. The second line units were organized to divisions, which usually fought under a common army's corps command. These second line units belonged to the two member states governments and only during wartime did the General Staff exercise authority over them.

The third line units were the K.K. Landsturm and the M.K. Népfelkelés.¹⁸ These units were organized to brigades and they also belonged to the member states. Artillery was not part of the Honvédség until 1913. This way the Austrians intended to prevent the Hungarians from rebelling openly. The armed forces mirrored this national competition as well. Only two Corps commanders were Hungarian out of the sixteen. During the war this number increased. Foreign policy was also a debate between the two nations. Austria favored the expansion of the Empire while Hungary refused. The main reason was the Hungarian influence in the common affairs. The leading idea although considered unavoidable the extension of the Empire. This attempt would save the Monarchy which was threatened to fall under the pressure of nation states. Franz Ferdinand led the expansion movement; his idea was a triple system with Austrians, Hungarians and

¹⁸ Peter Jung, *The Austro-Hungarian Forces in World War I 1914-16* (Oxford, Osprey, 2003), 4.

Slavs.¹⁹ The internal situation was difficult enough considering only these two nations, but there were eight other nations in the Empire, each with a population of above one million.

In foreign policy the differences were clearly shown. Austria was pro-Rumanian while Hungary was pro-Bulgarian. The deciding factor revolved around the situation of Transylvania. Rumania openly wanted to capture that territory, while Bulgaria could help to prevent it. The developments in the Balkan Wars naturally brought closer Bulgaria to the Central Powers, but Rumania legally remained a member of that alliance. Other issues appeared during the negotiations in 1915, when Austria finally agreed to cede territories to Italy to join the Central Powers. Hungary vetoed it considering a similar situation with Rumanian attempting to get Transylvania.²⁰ There were some common interests as well. Both nations agreed on the role of Serbia. Both nations supported the idea of a Balkan sphere of influence. The difference was how it would happen. As soon as World War One began, the two nations cooperated much better than before. Hungary's war efforts were especially enormous, the contribution to the common war effort increased dramatically. One good development was the Hungarian parliamentary opposition supported the unified action and stopped vetoing the governmental recommendations.²¹ This development meant the prime minister of Hungary, Gróf István Tisza, received extreme power; so he could veto every diplomatic or military action

¹⁹ Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe–The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 55.

²⁰ Szíjj Jolán, 672.

²¹ Ibid., 37.

which was against the Hungarian national interest. That increased the Hungarian influence in every aspect of the war.

The beginning of the World War One was extremely bad for Austria-Hungary. The previously planned political and military steps required revision because only basic directions remained. One interest was the Albanian question. Austria-Hungary had long planned to create a large Albania under her protectorate. This meant to include Kosovo into the declared borders, which would decrease the Serbian territories.²² The existence of the Albanian state was a great success for Austro-Hungarian diplomacy during the Balkan Wars. The creation of this country prevented Serbia from having her own seaports and increases her territories even more. Albania had a unique strategic feature, the Otranto-Strait. That strait is only 72 km wide, enabled the modern ship of the time to pass in less than two hours. If a country could control both parts of the strait, it was easy to close it. While the Ottoman Empire controlled the east side and Italy the west, the balance was granted. Italy's attitude towards Austria-Hungary was at least questionable if not hostile, but Serbia's was openly hostile. Therefore, an independent Albania kept both countries apart and provided the passage through the Otranto-Strait. Italy, however, sought to expand its area, and chose the west Balkan to expand, but inside the Triple Alliance the two powers had to negotiate every step in that region. After Italy joined to the Entente, Austria-Hungary tried to accomplish a plan for a Great Albania. Bulgarian territorial demands in Kosovo worried the Austro-Hungarians, and they did not want any Bulgarian forces to step into Albanian territory at all.

²² Pollmann Ferenc, 23.

After Italy joined to the Entente a new phase started in the naval war on the Adriatic Sea. The Italians had the same fate; a submarine sunk the *Giuseppe Garibaldi* cruiser in July 18th, 1915.²³ After that incident, only small ships fought in the Adriatic on both sides. So the Austro-Hungarian fleet did not rule the Adriatic Sea, but successfully denied the enemies to control it. The offensive use of the navy was less successful. As soon as the war broke out Austro-Hungarian ships tried to blockade Montenegrin ports. The very first sea battle occurred when a strong Entente fleet entered to the Adriatic Sea and tried to catch the blockading ships.²⁴ The *SMS Zenta* cruiser was sunk and after this incident only submarines and patrols disturbed the sea lines of communications to Montenegro. Based on the successful defense of the Adriatic Sea the respect of the Navy was high, but not enough to dictate major changes on the strategy in 1915.

Austria-Hungary regained her territories by end of 1915 and defeated Serbia. For the first time they had an opportunity to celebrate. The recently opened Italian front was worrying, although Austro-Hungarian troops successfully resisted the superior Italian forces.²⁵ The southern border of the Empire was still endangered by Montenegro, the smallest Entente ally. Now, the time had come to show what Austria-Hungary was able to do alone. Preparation for the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign started in December 1915.

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁵ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 10:898.

Bulgarian general situation in December 1915

Bulgaria had many issues during the first year of the Great War. The country had to be rebuilt after the Balkan Wars and the army must be readied for a new war. German advisors and military aid arrived to the country and soon the army was refit and reorganized. Central Powers and Bulgaria signed the agreement on September 26th, 1915 in Pless, where the Imperial German Headquarters was located.²⁶ The agreement had a secret clause, which guaranteed territorial gains to Bulgaria. The Central Powers assured to return Bulgaria to the borders as established by the First Balkan War.²⁷ The further territorial gains were not clarified, which caused some troubles later. Finally, on October 14th, 1915 Bulgaria declared war on Serbia and launched her offensive.

In December 1915, Bulgarian forces held the combined French-British Corps on the newly created Salonika front and their attention turned towards south. However, the Bulgarian 3rd Infantry Division still held the southern part of Kosovo and cities in Albania and in Montenegro.²⁸ The Bulgarian interest was to increase the territories, and they would involve into the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign to strengthen their positions.

Entente Powers general situation in December 1915

The year of 1915 was rather bad for the Entente Powers. There were two unsuccessful offensives against the German trenches on the western front. The battle of

²⁶ Pilch Jenő, *A világháború története 1914-1918* [The History of World War 1914-18] (Budapest, Franklin Kiadó Társulat, 1934), 122.

²⁷ Pollmann Ferenc, 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 33.

Gorlicze almost knocked Russia out of war by July 1915. Italy joined the Entente, but the result was only another instance of trench warfare, and the Austro-Hungarians were able to reinforce this front before the situation would become serious for them. The fall of Serbia was a huge prestige lost to the Entente. The whole fight started with the defence of their sovereignty and now it was gone. The Gallipoli campaign was also a failure, and by January 8th, 1916, all British units left the peninsula.²⁹ The other fronts of the Ottoman Empire were promising while the Russians were in Ottoman territory, the Mesopotamian and the Palestinian fronts were stable. In the diplomatic fight the Entente Powers lost Bulgaria, which meant the road from Germany to Turkey could be opened soon. The next neutral country was Greece, whose government was pro-Central Power but the people were most pro-Entente. The problem revolved around the Entente Powers use of Greek territories, hurting Greece neutrality and sovereignty. Greece protested but they had no real combat force to deal with the landed troops.³⁰ By the end of 1915, the outcome of the Greek situation was unknown. The French troops in Salonika attempted to help the Serbian Army during the Serbian campaign, but the Bulgarian Second Army successfully defended the occupied lands.

In the beginning of 1916, the Entente Powers gained combat power to face the Central Powers, but the situation was not so promising.

²⁹ Szíjj Jolán, 200.

³⁰ Ibid., 608.

Serbian general situation in December 1915

Serbia was the closest Russian ally in the Balkans and enjoyed all the associated advantages and disadvantages. Knowing Russia would provide support, Serbia conducted aggressive politics that confronted, in many ways, her biggest neighbor—Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary tried to reduce the territorial gains of Serbia and reduce its diplomatic influence, but had little success. Between these two countries there were many diplomatic clashes in the early twentieth century. The biggest one was the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which the Serbians considered their territory. At the time the Russian Empire was not strong enough to stand up for her little brother, so Serbia demobilized and the conflict was ended peacefully.³¹ The populace of Serbia became extremely anti-Austro-Hungarian.

The spark that ignited World War One came from this conflict. Serbia created a secret organization, which was named “Black Hands,” and as secret agents were sent to Austro-Hungarian territories.³² The Austro-Hungarians labeled this group as terrorist. They assassinated Franz Ferdinand and his wife and the ties to the Serbian government were obvious. Now Russia felt strong enough to support Serbia. In this matter, the war machines started to run and the rhetoric escalated.

During the first year of the war Serbia successfully defended her territories in three major campaigns. Austria-Hungary had to abandon the idea of conquering Serbia because the Russian troops pushed back the Eastern front to the Carpathian Mountains and all available men were sent there. Serbia was not threatened and they planned to

³¹ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1:57.

³² Szíjj Jolán, 172.

attack their vulnerable neighbor, but the army was really exhausted and had run out of supplies.³³ Most of the officer corps had fallen and many units became combat ineffective during the last Austro-Hungarian offensive. Refitting the troops took time and supply problems were even worse. Only a few day supplies were left by March 1915 and just the Entente shipment kept them from starving. In spite of the fact Serbia had an opportunity to attack, Austria-Hungary, combined with their newly jointed ally Italy, they did not use it because of their supply problems. Serbia trusted her own strength and prepared for defense, but a new threat arrived when Bulgaria joined to the Central Powers. The Entente Powers tried to convince Bulgaria earlier to join to them, but the territorial demands consisted of Serbian territories, which were not granted them by any means.³⁴ In September 1915, Central Powers launched a combined offensive from the north and soon achieved some success. The advance was slow, but after the Bulgarian joined them in October the Serbian troops were in a desperate situation. By the end of November, only Kosovo remained in their control, and soon they had to leave it. In December 1915, the remaining part of the Serbian army slowly moved through almost impassable mountainous terrain towards the Albanian ports. The Central Powers had defeated the Serbian Army, but groups of them joined the Montenegrin army to continue the fight; some of them attempted to defend the conquered Albania.

At the beginning of the Montenegro-Albania campaign, the Serbian Army in Albania was in horrible conditions. Small combat capable units still resisted, but only in order to gain time for the main body to retreat.

³³ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 10:826.

³⁴ Ibid., 853.

Montenegrin general situation in December 1915

Through the 19th century, Montenegro was part of the Russian sphere of influence, which was very beneficial to them. Russia was a strong ally and an excellent background for any action against the Ottomans. Serbia was considered as a relative nation and in many ways they were interdependent with Russia. Serbia did not have a seaport and the closest was through Montenegro. The good relationship with Russia made difficult any relations with the other Balkan aspirant power, Austria-Hungary. The Dual Monarchy did everything to reduce the territorial gains of the country, just because it was good for Russia and Serbia. There was a new idea to unite Serbia and Montenegro. This idea was supported by the Russians, Serbians and those Montenegrins who were educated in foreign countries and disappointed in the slow development of their country.³⁵ This idea met huge resistance by King Nikita, who ruled the Montenegro since 1860. He had ties to the King of Serbia, King of Italy, and two Grand Dukes of Russia who helped him to defend the independence of his country. However, relations with Serbia were extremely strained. Montenegrins found two Serbian time bombs found in the royal baggage in 1907 and also discovered an opposition party, which made King Nikita careful towards the Serbian contact.³⁶

When World War One broke out, Montenegro did not hesitate too much, and declared war on the Central Powers in August 5th, 1914,³⁷ in spite of the fact the port of

³⁵ Brigadier Peter Young, *The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated encyclopedia of World War I, Volumn 4, 1915-16* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corp, 1984), 1239.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Szíjj Jolán, 743.

Skadar was offered for them to remain neutral by the Central Powers. In the first year of the war, Montenegro captured some villages around the Austro-Hungarian port of Cattaro and advanced towards Bosnia-Herzegovina along the Drina-River. The Montenegrin Army lacked the artillery support and based on the fortresses' artillery support the Austro-Hungarian forces stopped the Montenegrin offensive.³⁸ After this failure, Montenegro made little contribution to the war, except for the existence of their forces and the strategic position of Mount Lovcen, which drained Austro-Hungarian troops from other fronts. The offensive was short, but the non-industrialized country was exhausted and waited for resupply. The supplies arrived slowly as a result of the willingness of the Entente Powers and the Austro-Hungarian submarine threat. In 1915, Montenegro joined Serbia to occupy the northern part of Albania.³⁹ When the Central Powers attacked Serbia in September 1915, Montenegro did not help them, but did secure their left flank. This act made it possible for the heroic retreat of the Serbian army to the Albanian ports. As the Serbian Army slowly moved to Corfu, the Montenegrins faced the Central Powers generally alone.

Italian general situation in December 1915

Italy was keen on unifying the Italian populated areas. Austria-Hungary held Italian populated territories and in spite of the Triple Alliance pact, these two countries considered themselves rivals. Italy had other desires, so in case of they would join to the

³⁸ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 4:401.

³⁹ Nigel Thomas, *Armies in the Balkans 1914-18* (Oxford: Osprey, 2001), 16.

Central Powers, but they were also ready to attack Austria-Hungary.⁴⁰ The beginning of the twentieth century Italy was more pro-Central Powers, but during the changing international situation they started to distance from the Central Powers and get closer to the Entente Powers. Due to the articles of the Triple Alliance pact Italy was not obliged to joint to the Central Powers although it was expected. There was a negotiation between Italy and Austria-Hungary about ceding territories to Italy and they would join to the war, but Hungary denied it considering Rumania similar demands towards Transylvania. So Italy declared neutrality in 1914 and later Austria-Hungary would cede that territories to Italy just remain neutral, but the time had passed. In the meantime Italy occupied Durazzo and Valona as a guarantee for herself and no one complained internationally against it.⁴¹ Great Britain was able to convince Italy and on May 23rd, 1915 Italy sent war to Austria-Hungary. Later the same year Italy sent war to Bulgaria and to Turkey, but to Germany only on August 26th, 1916.

The first year of the war was not so successful for the Italian army. The Austro-Hungarian Navy successfully destroyed the railroads running along the Adriatic coastline and the Italian troops were not able to reach the frontline until the Austro-Hungarian defense became ready. In 1915 Italy launched four offensive against the Austro-Hungarian forces with little success and huge casualty rates.⁴² In the end of 1915 the frontline was relatively quiet in the Italian Front.

⁴⁰ Szíjj Jolán, 510.

⁴¹ David Nicolle, *The Italian Army of World War I* (Oxford: Osprey, 2003), 10.

⁴² Ibid., 8.

The Neutral Countries in 1915

Both Central and Entente Powers initiated efforts to win the neutral countries for their sides or just keep them out of war in many ways. The Balkan countries used these opportunities to gain territories and other revenues. Rumania still not decided entering the war, but was about to it. The battle of Gorlicze and the Serbian campaign showed the combat power of the Central Powers and kept Rumania neutral for one more year.⁴³ The Montenegrin operation was about to strengthen this feeling and it was accomplished. Greece was another neutral country in the Balkans. The Greek King was pro-Central Powers, the prime minister was pro-Entente. After the Entente Powers violated the Greek sovereignty landing around Salonika, Prime Minister Vazileos officially invited the Entente Powers into the country.⁴⁴ That created a friction in the country. The Central Powers were about to honor Greece's neutrality and avoided to cross its borders. The Montenegrin-Albanian campaign would have an additional effect, to courage the pro-Central Powers forces in Greece. These two countries' politics had some effect on the execution of the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign.

Albanian general situation in December 1915

Among the Balkan countries Albania was the last, who declared their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. The Albanian uprising in 1908 to 1910 opposed the Young Turk movement and the whole Balkans turned into a battlefield. Albanian territory was occupied by Montenegrin, Serbian and Greek troops by the end of

⁴³ Szíjj Jolán, 597.

⁴⁴ Thomas, 24.

the First Balkan War. Opposition between the Entente and Central Powers created the Albanian state while the Central Powers were about to deny Serbian or Montenegrin access to the Adriatic Sea. Finally the conference of London internationally recognized Albanian independence and its borders.⁴⁵ All of her neighbors had territorial demands and Albania's internal situation was also bad. Different Albanian tribes fought for power. On February 21st, 1914, the principality of Albania formed under William of Wied, a German prince.⁴⁶ The country was still unstable, but many efforts were made to secure the situation. Groups of people were sent to foreign countries to study and serve as a base of their future government. Italy and Austria-Hungary were these foreign countries who had some influence in the future of the country.

The outbreak of World War One interrupted the government's efforts and the country was split into numerous regional governments. Those governments were set up based on religious and tribal ties. A peasant revolt, led by Essad Pasha, made the Prince flee Albania, and the country fell deep into chaos. Greek forces seized the most southern portion of the country, and the Italians the port of Valona on December 28th, 1914.⁴⁷ Serbia was to occupy Albania mostly by engaging her fighting forces in a separate region while the soldiers were needed on the Austro-Hungarian front. In early 1915, the situation was calm in the Balkans because of the Serbians were exhausted and the Central Powers offensive on the Eastern front. Serbia decided to invade Albania, with

⁴⁵ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 1:76.

⁴⁶ Szíjj Jolán, 28.

⁴⁷ Thomas, 16.

Montenegro's support.⁴⁸ They used only small forces to seize key cities and ports, but by the end, central Albania was under Serbian and northern Albania under Montenegrin control.

A group of Albanians trained in Austria-Hungary to spy on the Serbians and to create guerilla troops to fight against the invaders. By the end of 1915, the situation in Albania showed a chaotic picture of retreating Serbians, advancing Italians and guerillas, which fought the Serbians and each other.

Summary

The Central Powers had a huge internal debate about the war goals in the fall of 1915. The German Chief of General Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn insisted on his method to achieve a decisive victory on the western front and bleed out the French. He focused every available force around Verdun. Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of General Staff, had a different method to achieve victory. He wanted to defeat the Entente Powers one by one. He insisted on continuing the Balkan Campaign and after the complete Central Powers victory, continued on to the Italian front and finally the Austro-Hungarian forces would be able to launch a second front against France through the Balkans. These different and competing methods illustrated the differences between the two Chief of General Staffs' personalities and made the cooperation impossible between these two countries. The Bulgarian forces could help in the campaign, but some territorial debate with the Austro-Hungarians created a tension. When Bulgaria joined to the Central Powers a pact was signed in which the territorial gains were granted to Bulgaria.

⁴⁸ Magyar Királyi Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, 10:841.

That was her former borders, what was lost in the second Balkan War. The Bulgarian forces although advance further than their promised borderline was and they intended to keep those territories. The area was southern Kosovo and Austria-Hungary also wanted that province under her control. The two countries turned to Germany to decide this debate. Germany shared the province in two equal parts, which hurt the Austro-Hungarian interests. Preventing further territorial debates Austria-Hungary decided to launch a unilateral campaign. They had enough forces to defeat Montenegro and after continue the offensive in Albania, but not enough to do these operations simultaneously. This decision was a key event. With fewer forces the task looked still doable, but the Serbian forces would gain enough time to escape and the Italians could reinforce their contingent in southern Albania and prevent the control of all Albanian territories. The Austro-Hungarians took this risk and launched the campaign. They lost so much time defeating the Montenegrins and securing the lines of communications in northern Albania to allow the Serbians to execute the evacuation and the Italians to reinforce their defense in southern Albania. The importance of multinational cooperation was a key of success in the World War One, and it is still today.

CHAPTER 3

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

A leader must understand the environment where he or she will fight. This allows the commander to project combat power under the best possible condition. This idea was known in the ancient times and during the Great War as well. Although many of the planning documents are not available, the analysis describes how the environment influenced decisions of leaders'. This chapter analyzes the environment using mission variable (METT-TC method) and also shows the starting situation of the campaign. The analysis of the environment will focus on the following questions. "What difficulties did prevent the attacking force fast advance?" "What did lead to the exhaustion of the troops and to the logistical problems?" "How did this difficulties influence the campaign?"

Mission

The Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army's mission was:⁴⁹

1. Defeat Montenegro;
2. Capture the remains of the Serbian Army;
3. Secure the flank of the Central Power's Balkan Front;
4. Deny the Italian access to the Albanian ports;
5. Create conditions for a successful offensive towards Greece.

The defeat of Montenegro promised multiple advantages. The primary one was obvious; the defeat of one of the Entente allies would give a moral boost to the Central

⁴⁹ Feldmarschallleutnant Theodor Konopicky, *Die Niederwerfung Montenegros* [The defeat of Montenegro], accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.wintersonnenwende.com/scriptorium/deutsch/archiv/weltkampf/wer0518.html>.

Powers and at the same time the prestige of the Entente decrease. The victory would secure the whole southern border of Austria-Hungary, which would allow them to decrease the military presence in the bordering areas. Capturing Mount-Lovcen would secure the southernmost Austro-Hungarian port–Cattaro.⁵⁰ That port would increase the capacity of the Central Powers navies, because German submarine detachment was operating from that port too.

Capturing the retreating Serbian Army promised the total victory against the fiercest adversary of Austria-Hungary. Without an army, Serbia would not be able to continue the war. That outcome would increase the prestige of the Central Powers and especially the Dual Monarchy. The defeat of Serbia would also release the 23,000 Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war (POW).⁵¹ If the POWs would be freed the Austro-Hungarian morale would increase and more than one division fighting power would make a difference in the long World War.

The flank security was an important task too. The Bulgarian forces were able to hold the Entente Salonika Front yet.⁵² Considering the British sea power and the French land power; it was just a matter of time until the Entente forces would launch an offensive on the Balkan Front.

Italy occupied the major ports of Albania in 1914. This development was unacceptable for Austria-Hungary after Italy joined to the Entente Powers. The secured ports provided good transit stations for the Serbian army and good bridgehead for a

⁵⁰ Szíjj Jolán, 435.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

⁵² Ibid., 79.

possible Italian flank attack. Those ports were also key for the supply of the friendly troops while the land avenues of approaches were not developed and heavily weather dependant. If the Italians could hold only one of the ports they could easily deny the access of the Central Powers navies through the Strait of Otranto.⁵³

During the planning phase a debate between Erich von Falkenhayn and Conrad von Hötzendorf, the German and Austro-Hungarian chief of general staffs about the common plans in the Balkans.⁵⁴ Falkenhayn preferred the direct approach and searched the decision on the western front. He considered the Balkans as a flank area and he did not want to waste more time and resources before launching his new offensive on the western front. Hötzendorf offered an indirect approach—step by step defeat the Entente on the Balkans, continue in Italy and after Austria-Hungary would be able to launch a second front against France through the Alps. He insisted to continue a combined operation reaching the final victory in the Balkans. This debate was not solved and after the German forces left the theatre Austria-Hungary acted alone. This act was also about to gain back the national prestige and prove in case of Austria-Hungary is able to launch a unilateral offensive. Conrad von Hötzendorf was far from happy about this option, but Austria-Hungary was quickly became a junior partner in the alliance.

Enemy

The enemy forces will be described from the Austro-Hungarian point of view. Each force had different characteristics which will be examined based on all available

⁵³ Ibid., 527.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 109.

data. The Austro-Hungarian forces had much less and much different data's so the end of each paragraph the historical assessment will be shown.

Montenegrin Army

The Montenegrin Army did not have any cavalry, air units, and the country did not have any navy. The existing armed forces were expanded from 35,000 men as the war began to 48,000 by May 20th, 1915.⁵⁵ The defeat of these forces looked simple for the first look, but it was a quite challenging task regarding to the circumstances.

The overall picture of the Montenegrin army shows an infantry focused small army. In spite of the fact the army did not have massive artillery or machine gun support; they fought fiercely for their motherland and had a lot of combat experience. The following figure shows the details of the Montenegrin Army.

⁵⁵ Thomas, 14.

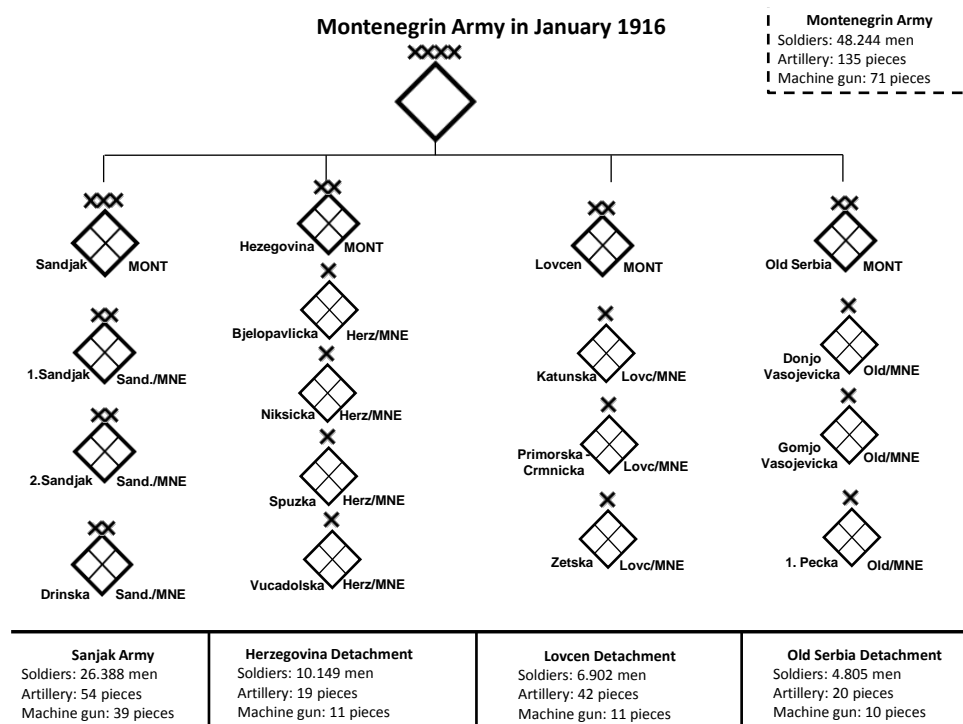


Figure 2. Montenegrin Army's Organization end of 1915

Source: Created by author, data from Nigel Thomas, *Armies in the Balkans 1914-1918* (Oxford: Osprey, 2001), 15.

The original mobilization system was based on three age groups. The first line units were filled with 18 and 19 year old recruits, the second line (first line reserve) with 20 to 53 and the third line (second line reserve) 53 to 62 year old recruits.⁵⁶ This system worked well as the Montenegrin armed forces used the militia system since the foundation of the country.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.

Equipment

Montenegrin Infantry was equipped mostly with Russian Mosin-Negant rifles, but Serbian, Austrian and Turkish weapons were used as well.⁵⁷ The machine guns showed also a strange collection from different types, but these equipments were up to date.⁵⁸ The artillery was equipped with very mixed tubes. Each infantry brigade was supported by a four gun strong mountain artillery battery. The field guns were generally modern, but the heavy artillery was quite obsolete, some of them even muzzle-loading cannon.⁵⁹ Their equipment status was poor. The single infantryman had the same effectiveness as the Austro-Hungarians, but the much less numbers of supporting weapons reduced their effectiveness.

The Montenegrin army's organization followed the militia system. The basic element was the company with about 100 infantrymen. The battalions were organized from four to five companies, depended on the population of the designated areas. Five to ten battalions consisted of a brigade and this formation had an artillery battery and some other supporting units.⁶⁰ The division is made from some brigades, but that was also various. The divisional artillery had three batteries, one mountain artillery, and one gun, one howitzer or mortar batteries. Above this there were some heavy artillery pieces

⁵⁷ War Office General Staff, *Armies of the Balkan States 1914-18* (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1996), 62.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹ vitéz tiszabeő Hellebronth Antal, *A Magyar Tüzér* [The Hungarian artilleryman] (Budapest: Reé László könyvkiadó és könyvterjesztő vállalat, 1938), 216.

⁶⁰ Thomas, 14.

mostly around Mount Lovcen. This organization was an effective use of the country's resources; the territorial militia was extremely effective defending their homeland.

Training and Experience

The Montenegrin Army was militia based. They did not receive formal military training, but all of them fought in the two Balkan Wars and during the first two years of World War One. They were proven fierce soldiers, skilled in raids and defense, but only in small unit level. They lacked the staff experience as well, and Serbian officers and NCO's were designated to improve the effectiveness of the Montenegrin forces.⁶¹

The Montenegrin forces were not a professional military, but had extremely good capabilities. Their combat experiences proved the effectiveness against conventional Turkish and Austro-Hungarian forces. The assault against the Montenegrin defense lines were not an easy job to any military.

Leadership and Command

The Montenegrin Army was militia based and after they raised the army to its maximum, a serious shortage of officers and NCOs appeared. The Serbians helped them. In 1915 still 34 Serbian officers were employed in the Montenegrin Army, especially staff, commander and training functions. There were also 164 NCO deployed and majority of them to the artillery.⁶² These officers and NCO's were rather functioning commanders than mentors. This system provided some influence to the Serbian General Staff over the Montenegrin forces, but it was minimal.

⁶¹ Ibid., 15.

⁶² War Office General Staff, 63.

Supply

Montenegro lacked the military industry, so every war material must be imported. The ammunition situation was challenging and especially with the artillery the execution was influenced by the supply situation a lot.⁶³ The successful Austro-Hungarian naval raid against San Giovanni di Medua on December 5th, 1915 created a huge shortage on the ammunition supply system. The effect was unknown by the Austro-Hungarian leadership until Montenegro was defeated but this event showed the good effect of the cooperation with the land and naval operations.

Serbian Forces in Montenegro

The retreating Serbian Army had units who were still eager to fight. They joined to the Montenegrins and help their defensive fight. According to Austro-Hungarian sources one infantry regiment and an artillery battery with six guns supported the Montenegrins.⁶⁴ These Serbian forces were deployed to the Eastern sector of Montenegrin defense and helped strengthen the lines there. Their presence although created a long lasting debate during the negotiations of the Montenegrin surrender.

Summary of the Montenegrin Forces

In conclusion the advantage of the Montenegrin forces was the combat experience, the fight in a well-known terrain and the prepared defense. The disadvantages were the broken morale, the bad supply system, lack of artillery and machine gun

⁶³ Ibid., 236.

⁶⁴ von Horstenau et al., 4, 8.

support, and the lack of mobility. An infantry based offensive against them easily would fail, but they were vulnerable for the artillery fire.

According to the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army the Montenegrin forces were 36,000 men strong.⁶⁵ The Montenegrin soldiers learned to respect, because they extremely well used the terrain and had good marksmanship skills. On the flipside their fighting spirit was guerilla like, based on raids and small engagements in a battle their endurance assessed low. The lack of fire support was known by the Austro-Hungarian leadership but they did not underestimate the enemy.

Forces in Albania-Italy

In Albania, the Austro-Hungarian forces met different enemies. The primary and the most capable force was the Italian Army. In detail although they looked a bit different.

Equipment

They were the best equipped and best organized among the other forces that were in Albania that time. The principal Italian rifle was the bolt-action 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano M1891 with a six-round magazine, though many Territorial units still had old 10.4mm Vetterli M1871 single shot weapons. The Italian Army had entered the war with only 700 machine guns, but this number increased dramatically. The main Italian design was the 6.5mm Fiat-Revelli M1914, a tripod-mounted weapon fed by an unusual 50-

⁶⁵ vitéz Czékus Zoltán, *Az 1914-18. évi világháború összefoglaló történelme* [The summarized history of World War of 1914-18] (Budapest: Stádium sajtókiadó részvénytársaság, 1930), 264.

round magazine divided into 5-round compartments.⁶⁶ The Italian artillery had almost the same characteristics than the Austro-Hungarian. Due to the war demands the obsolete types were still used together with some modern pieces. They did not have adequate heavy artillery, but due to the war experiences they were about to develop.

Considering the equipment status the Italian and the Austro-Hungarian forces had almost equal qualities this period of the war.

Organization

An Italian infantry regiment had three battalions, each 1043 man strong. An Infantry battalion consisted of four 250 man companies and generally two machine guns, rarely four.⁶⁷

The overall command of the Italian forces in the Balkans belonged to the newly created “Special Corps of Albania,” and from March 20th, 1916 renamed to XVI. Corps.⁶⁸ In Durazzo the Savona brigade was deployed to secure the port and help the Serbians to embark. During the Albanian operation, only the 15th Infantry Regiment was available for the brigade, so the half of the combat power joined to the brigade only after 1st of April. The rest of the forces were deployed to the Italian main effort, Valona. Those units were the Verona brigade, a territorial militia brigade (TMB), the 10th Bersaglieri Regiment, a cavalry troop and 14 battery of artillery. This units were reinforced with the missing regiment of the Savona brigade (16th IR), four brigades

⁶⁶ Nicolle, 33.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

(Marche, Puglie, Tanaro, Arno), two infantry regiments (36th IR, territorial militia regiment 38), one cavalry regiment (Lodi) and 21 and half additional artillery battery. This force composition meant to the Austro-Hungarian forces, if they want to be successfully defeat the Italians, do it before 1st of April.

According to the organization, the Austro-Hungarian forces had some advantage because they already implemented the war experiences, while the Italians just began those changes.

Training and Experience

The Italian Infantry tactic was poor in 1915, although new effective methods were developed in November 1915.⁶⁹ The units in the Balkans were newly created units, so they still used the old ineffective tactics and lacked the combat experience. During the early part of the war co-operation between Italian artillery and infantry was often poor, the gunners tending to bombard areas rather than specific targets and doing little counter-battery work.⁷⁰

The Italians had a huge disadvantage regarding to training and experience compared to the Austro-Hungarians. These new units must survive their first battles to become effective.

Leadership and Command

The Commander of the Special Corps was Major General Bertotti and the XVI. Corps commander was Lieutenant General Settimio Piacentini. Italian officers were

⁶⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

generally courageous and maintained their poise under fire; but foreign observers criticized them for lacking rapport with their men, and for a relative lack of tactical intelligence.⁷¹ General Cadorna, the Italian Chief of General Staff had a rigid personality and he was notoriously intolerant towards anyone who disagreed with him. He released 800 officers during his command and he strongly encouraged any personal initiative.⁷² This behavior had a decisive influence on the Italian troops' performance on the battlefields.

The Austro-Hungarian system was more permissive and combined with the personal war experiences provided a significant advantage in leadership level.

Supply

Italy had a shell crisis early on in the war and the industry was hardly able to supply the army's needs in 1915.⁷³ The supply concentrated on the Italian front and the secondary Balkan front received much less of it. Furthermore the Balkan theatre was supplied via the Adriatic and due to the submarine threat this system was not efficient enough to fulfill all needs.

The Austro-Hungarians had better industrial background in 1916, but far worse lines of communication in Albania. The Italian forces had slightly better supply lines, but bad industrial background. During the Albanian operation both had supply difficulties, no one had significant advantage.

⁷¹ Ibid., 16.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 37.

Serbian Forces in Albania

The Serbian Army was the other significant force in the theatre. The Montenegrin defense had the task to gain some time for the retreating Serbian army fixing the Austro-Hungarian forces. There were three assembly areas where the Serbians gather their forces and prepared to leave Albania. The first area was near Skutari where the majority of the Army assembled. Here the Army group Belgrade, the First, the Second, and the Third armies waited for evacuation, all together eight divisions with 89,000 soldiers. The other area was near Durazzo, where the New Mountains Group and the Timok Army group assembled, all together six divisions and two detachments, with 40,000 soldiers.⁷⁴ They had serious supply problems and due the defeat the morale was low. Only after a longer pause this force would be available for any combat operation. They did not intend to fight; only in the case of rear guard units delay the advancing forces to gain time.

The Serbian Army had some units able to fight, but their combat effectiveness were low. The Austro-Hungarian forces had significant advantages over the Serbian forces.

The Albanian Forces supporting the Serbians

The Albanian military forces were dispersed and chaotic due to the young country's tribal system and religious differences. The Serbian occupation created a national resistance, although some tribal leaders decided to support the Serbians. After its independence, in the end of 1913 Albania decided to create a 12,000 strong army and a 4,000 strong gendarme. The Army commander was Colonel Ali Shefqeti and the

⁷⁴ von Horstenau et al., 4:5.

Gendarme commander was Essad Pasha Toptani.⁷⁵ The army organization was in an embryonic state, the gendarme became the private army of Essad. He was a pro-Serbian politician, who was appointed to defense minister as well, but the Army refused to serve under him. Essad launched a coup, and he controlled the central part of the country. The army was disbanded and became part of its original tribal force. A 20,000 strong force under Bajram Curri controlled the northern part of Albania. He was pro-Austro-Hungarian. A third group was the central-east part of the country under Haxhi Qerim. Northern Epirus was occupied by Greece in 1914, so the territorial unity was not a trait of Albania that time. On May 19th, 1915 the Serbian Army attacked Albania and destroyed Curri's force and relieved the encircled Essad in Durazzo. The Serbian influence expanded to the northern and the central part of the country. The Serbian invasion however alienated them among the population and the mood was pro-Austro-Hungarian. Essad had about a 2,000 strong force ruled the surrounding of Durazzo. It was the only organized Albanian fighting force, which meant some obstacle to the Austro-Hungarian forces.

Naval Operation

The Entente Powers had a significant superiority in the sea. It was especially true in the Mediterranean. Due to the Central Power's submarine force, the Entente Navies were not able to gain naval supremacy on the Adriatic Sea, but the outside of the Otranto-barrier the superiority was not a question.

⁷⁵ Thomas, 14.

The Italian Fleet was larger than the Austro-Hungarian Fleet. In 1916 the Italian Fleet's task was to contain the Central Power's fleet in the Adriatic Sea. They received some augmenting force from Great Britain and France, but the majority of the force belonged to Italy. In comparison with the Austro-Hungarian battleships, the Italian navy had a minor advantage.⁷⁶ The cruiser fleet had nine armored cruisers and 10 small cruisers. The torpedo-destroyer fleet had 28 destroyers and the submarine fleet was huge with 62 submarines.⁷⁷ That meant the Italian Fleet alone would not defeat the Austro-Hungarian Fleet, but both navies would suffer enormous losses.

The first naval operations in 1915 shaped the rest of the war period. After the loss of *Giuseppe Garibaldi* armored cruiser, the Italian capital ships rarely entered into the Adriatic-Sea. Light cruisers, destroyers and torpedo-boats executed coastal raids against the Dalmatian coastline with minor results. They had chosen the blockade tactic and operating from Taranto, which was two hours distance from the Strait of Otranto.

Great Britain sent a cruiser detachment to reinforce the Italians. This detachment had three cruisers (HMS Dartmouth, HMS Weymouth, HMS Bristol) and those ships were stronger than the Austro-Hungarian cruisers.⁷⁸ Occasionally other British vessels supported the blockade or a major naval operation.

The French Navy had a forward operating base in Malta, where the majority of the Fleet was stationed. They could reinforce the Italians in a few hours distance in case of a major engagement in the Strait of Otranto or in the Adriatic-Sea.

⁷⁶ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 54.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 52.

The whole campaign was executed near to the Adriatic Sea and the naval power easily influenced the land operations. The Albanian ground lines of communication were in extremely bad condition and the best way to provide support there by a naval supply convoy. The evacuation of the Serbian forces was planned also through the seaports and the Austro-Hungarians tried to prevent it. The naval considerations were secondary, but important part of the whole campaign.

Summary of the Forces in Albania

The Italian forces had the chance to successfully resist to the Austro-Hungarian attacks, but only in a favorable situation. Their leadership and experience was much less weaker than the Dual Monarchy's forces. The Serbian forces were disorganized and about to evacuate. They did not want to meet with the Austro-Hungarian forces and to prevent that rear guards were designated to delay the attackers. The Albanian forces had only very limited influence on the battlefield. Their main enemy was the pro-Austro-Hungarian Albanian auxiliary units.⁷⁹ The Albanians had little hope to survive a conventional fight with the attackers but in irregular warfare they could influence the campaign.

The Entente enjoyed the naval superiority, but the submarine threat was huge so close to the Austro-Hungarian ports. The cooperation among the navies was in embryonic state in 1915, but dramatically increased in early 1916. The Austro-Hungarian naval raids raised some attention and after the Gallipoli situation calmed down the whole Entente

⁷⁹ Szíjj Jolán, 27.

Mediterranean fleet could concentrate on the brash Austro-Hungarian fleet. The situation did not favor to the Dual Monarchy.

Terrain and Weather

The geography of the west-Balkan peninsula is rugged and mountainous. This is just part of the problem-set, what the advancing Austro-Hungarian forces had to overcome. The mountainous terrain canalize the movements and the river crossings required special troops, resources, and time. The weather could raise the level of the rivers increase the obstacle effect and the muddy terrain can prevent the passage of heavy equipments. This part of the paper examines the battle scene by countries.

Montenegro

Three main terrain features constitute the landscape of Montenegro. The high mountain areas in the north and the east are posing as natural defense line along the border. This mountain more than 2,000 meter (6,000 feet) high and the highest point is Bobotov Kuk with 2,522 meter. Since these mountains are the most ice-eroded section of the Balkan Peninsula, this terrain feature provides very small mobility to the attacker. Naturally the mountains had colder temperatures than in sea level, so the ice and snow also increased the obstacle effect.⁸⁰ This area had weak vegetation especially in the higher areas, but some thick forested areas could be observed. The second terrain feature is the central and western karsts segment. The elevation of this karsts region is between 100 and 1800 meters. The basic rock type is limestone and that is dissolves sinkholes and underground caves. The rapidly changing elevation and the deep river valleys make this

⁸⁰ Ibid., 477.

area heavily crossable. It also does not help the agricultural cultivation. The vegetation varies from thin forest to the pasture. The capital city (Cettinje) locates here. The third terrain feature is the plains. Montenegro had only three small plains areas. The Zeta river valley or Bjelopavlici Plain which started in the northeast of the country and it is the second biggest plain in the country. The most populated city (Podgoritza) locates here. The second plain type area is the Skutari-lake plain. This is located 40 meters above sea level and very densely populated. The third plain area is the coastline. South of the Bay of Cattaro there is a narrow coastal plain no more than four kilometers wide. This coastal area guarded by mountains in the east and some small coastal settlements are located there. The country's geography provides Montenegro a natural defense line with small avenues of approaches. This feature made Mount Lovcen a key terrain, while it guarded one of the two possible avenues of approaches towards the heartland. The advance towards the rear also not easy, while the valleys canalize the movements and provide excellent ambush positions. This obstacle effect especially true in wintertime when the roads are slippery and the different precipitation make the attacker's life miserable. This terrain favors to the defender in every aspect.

The hydrology of Montenegro is also worth to mention. The eastern mountains are the divide between the Danube watershed and the small Adriatic rivers. The Lim, Piva and Tara rivers are the influents of Drina which led to the Danube. The biggest river is the Moraca River, which is 112 km long and it flows to the Skutari-Lake. The Moraca had two influent rivers; the Zeta River which is 70 kilometers long and the smaller Cvijevna. Due to the high precipitation, there are more than 25 rivers flowing across the country. The biggest lake is the Skutari-Lake. It is 50 kilometers (31 miles) long and 16

kilometers (9.9 miles wide, total of 370 km² (142, 9 sq miles) surface with 5, 1 meter depth as an average. This is navigable and it has a connection to the Adriatic Sea through the Bojana River, which is 41 kilometers long and also navigable with small boats. The attacking forces must be ready to cross the rivers many times. The steep riverbanks and the strong streamline require special troops, equipments and time. These rivers canalize the movement in the country. The Skutari Lake is sailable water and its connection to the sea makes it a significant terrain feature. The main ports are Skutari and Virpazar, where the Montenegrin boats were located. Both sides of the lake are difficult terrain, so the fastest way leads through the lake. This advantage was not used by the Austro-Hungarian troops during the offensive.

The climate of Montenegro is hotter Mediterranean with a long hot summer and a mild (cool) winter together with a lot of precipitation. The Montenegrin Mountains receive the highest amount rainfalls in Europe. The annual precipitation in the Karsts region near to Bay of Cattaro is 4,928 mm (194 inch), which do not favor any military activity. The average temperature in January is 8°C (46°F) in the coastline and -3°C (26°F) in the mountains. The snow cover is rare along the coastline, but in the higher mountains the annual snow cover is 120 days. The climate provides a lot of precipitation in this season and that means high water level in the rivers. The mountains receive a lot of snow, which increase their obstacle effects and due to the mild temperature avalanches could occur. The biggest effect was the high water level and the muddy terrain due to the high precipitation.

Montenegro had only one small rail line. It had a narrow gauge (75mm) line from Antivari to Virpazar. The length of this rail line was only 44 kilometers (26 miles). The

rail was constructed in 1909 by an Italian company, and it went up to 600 meters above sea level. The peacetime operation system was one passenger and one goods train run in each direction per day. A passenger train takes about three hours for a single journey. The rolling stocks were very limited, three composite carriages with engines, two ordinary engines, 12 passenger carriages and 30 goods trucks.⁸¹ A report said Montenegro had 228 miles of excellent carriage roads, admirably maintained. The following roads were mentioned in the report. The Cattaro-Cetinje road had a lot of curves with a bridge over the Zeta River. The second road was lead from Podgoritza to the port of Plavnitz and the third from Antivari to Rieka. These three roads were kept in good shape, the rest of them had steep gradients and dangerous in some places. The road from Mitrovitza (Serbia) to Cetinje was in very pretty bad condition and in some part of the road only mountain ponies were able to pass. The best shaped road is the Podgoricza-Cetinje road which was fitted for heavy traffic. In 1909 the local parliament voted 91,000 Pounds for road construction and upgrade so this picture might be better a bit. This level of infrastructure means the attacker could count only for its own assets. After the country seized, huge work must be done to provide the supply to the advancing troops in Albania.

The country's main port was Antivari. This harbor had a 300 meters long mole and a 20 meters breadth quay.⁸² The harbor work was still ongoing in the outbreak of the world war one. The sea transport was not significant and during the war it was not used too much due to the close Austro-Hungarian naval forces. Dulcigno was a small harbor, but it had no port infrastructure was built, only small boats operated there. The port

⁸¹ War Office General Staff, 29.

⁸² Ibid., 32.

facilities would not offer too good facilities to provide additional supply to the advancing troops.

A huge problem was the water source. Due to the Karsts areas lack of underground water sources, the cistern system used widely. The precipitation was collected and used even for drinking. This source is unusual to most of the European population and easily can be contaminated. The water source is a key element in every military operation. The cistern system can not produce fresh water; it is hard to drink for those who are not used to it. The hygiene must be a serious consideration as well.

Albania

The 70 percent of the country are mountainous and often inaccessible. There are four main geographical areas: The Northern Mountain Range, Central Mountain Range, Southern Mountain Range, and the Western Lowlands. The Northern Mountain Range is an extension of the Dinari Alps and often called Montenegrin Limestone Plateau. These mountains are more folded and rugged, but most of them are plateau. The rivers had deep valleys, steep sides and arable valley floors. The rivers are not navigable and rather mean and obstacle than a movement path. Roads are few and poor. The central Mountain Range has the highest mountains in Albania. These high mountains are, together with the adjacent smaller areas, the most inaccessible terrain of the Balkan Peninsula.⁸³ The Southern Mountain Range are more accessible to the south, the river floors are wider and more populated. The Western lowlands consisted of the coastal belt and the central

⁸³ NémethJózsef, *A 2. hegyidandárátkelése az Albán-Alpokon 1916 februárhaviában, Hadtörténelmi közlemények*, [The K.u.K. 2. Mountain Brigade's passage to the Albanian Alps in February 1916, Hungarian Military History periodicals] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1929), 44.

uplands. The coastal belt is all the way from the Montenegrin Border to Valona and extends 16 to 50 kilometers to east. There are large marshlands, other areas of bare and eroded badlands. The coastal belt is characterized by low scrub vegetation, varying from barren to dense. The population located mostly along the rivers, where the lands are more arable. The central uplands located on the average sea level of 300 to 900 meters. Due to the higher precipitation the lands are more arable.

The Austro-Hungarian forces considered the terrain as difficult, but passable. The East-West avenue of approach through the mountains is not a good choice. The retreating Serbian forces were able to go through the Albanian Alps, so the Austro-Hungarians could do either. The mountains generally lack of the roads and the snow creates additional problems. The North-South avenues of approach were more promising. The mountains there had less height and bigger passages. The geography supports the North-South avenue of approach.

Almost all Albania is part of the Adriatic watershed system. That means all rivers have the general East-west direction and for a military that means river-crossing and natural obstacle. The Drin in the north provides the first huge obstacle not just south-west direction, but also to east-west due to two of its influents, the Black Drin and the white Drin. Drin had a constant and strong drainage due to its watershed consisted of both Northern and Central Mountain Ranges. The central area had smaller rivers, which flow almost strictly to east-west direction and have an irregular water level. Five bigger rivers present obstacles here, Fan, Mat, Ishem, Erzem, and Shkumbin. These had wider river beds and they often flooded. Further south the Semani and Vojusa rivers present

obstacles.⁸⁴ Both rivers arise from the Southern Mountain Range and the water level is high wintertime and almost dry in summer. The rivers generally flow from east to west, so the water geography supports the East-West direction. The attacker, who advancing from the North to the South must be prepared to cross multiple rivers. The rivers lacked the bridges and other infrastructures, so laying the bridges will take time and slow down the advance.

The climate of Albania is generally Mediterranean, but with many sub climate. The coastal zone is typical Mediterranean. The highlands have Mediterranean-continental climate. The average winter temperature is 7°C (45°F) in the lowlands and 2°C (35°F) in the mountainous area. The average annual precipitation is 1000mm in the lowlands and 1800mm in the mountains. The seasonal variation is high. The climate provides a lot of precipitation during the winter, raising the rivers and creating mud in the lowland. The rapidly changing temperature melting the snow in the mountain and later freeze it creates unpassable slippery roads. This season slow down every movement in the area.

The manmade terrain features are extremely poor in the country. During the Ottoman rule there was no major infrastructure development and after the declaration of independence the country fallen to a civil war. There were no rail line at all, and hard surface road as well.⁸⁵ The best roads were made of cobble stones but the heavy traffic easily ruined them. The bigger cities were linked with carriage roads, but the river-crossings had a lot of difficulties. Most of the rivers had shallows, but only in case of low river level. Very few bridges existed and they were in bad shape. The extremely poor

⁸⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 47.

infrastructure requires a high level of engineer support and a lot of resources to provide mobility to the advancing troops. Due to the build up time, the advance will be slow.

The marshes and small lakes hosted the anopheles mosquitoes, which submitting the malaria. This issue was not relevant during the early stages of the operation, but in early march the malaria season starts.

The North-South avenues of approach in Albania looked more possible than the East-West, but it was still more than challenging. The natural obstacles together with the lack of infrastructure made this task very demanding.

Troops and Support Available

In the end of 1915 the Austro-Hungarian army had a difficult situation. The Eastern Front was calm at this time, but the Russians slowly recovered from the defeat in the battle of Gorlicze. Still that front gets the priority and no units were deployed to other fronts. The Italian Front had the second priority and the increasing aggressiveness of the Italians also prevented the reinforcement of the Balkan theatre. The units which executed the Serbian campaign were the only ones the army was able to spare for any offense. The following chart shows the detailed information.

Force allocation of Austria-Hungary end of 1915

Forces	Eastern Front	Italian Front	Balkan Front
Infantry Division	40	18	4
Separate Infantry Brigade	6	6	9
Total infantryman	437,500	268,000	92,000
Cavalry Division	11	-	-
Cavalry Troop	338	30	7
Total cavalry	36,000	3,000	1,200
Artillery Battery	465	373	85
Total artillery pieces	2,039	2,310	305
Air Company	8	7	3

Figure 3. Force Allocation of Austria-Hungary end of 1915

Source: By author, based on Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehn, Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918] (Wien, Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 3:Annex 4.

Certainly these units in the Balkan Front were not among the best ones. Only the 47th Division existed prior the war and that was a mountain infantry division made from detached battalions from first line infantry regiments, and second line Landwehr regiments (23rd and 37th Regiments).⁸⁶ Even this unit organization changed a lot during the Balkan offensives and only one brigade from three remained under its subordination and inside that brigade only two battalions were originally part of the division.⁸⁷ The

⁸⁶ Szíjj Jolán, 779.

⁸⁷ von Horstenau et al., 4:Annex 5.

other three divisions were war formations from additional first, second and third line units. These divisions were not the strongest in manpower either. The brigades were mostly third line units. The infantry force ratio towards Montenegro was 1.7:1, so much less than necessary for a successful campaign. This number is true when we consider only the pure manpower, but due to the equipment status, the Austro-Hungarian forces had more than 3:1 advantage.

Based on the Albanians positive feelings towards Austria-Hungary some Albanian auxiliary forces were recruited. These auxiliary troops were organized by tribes and later formed battalions. They were led by an Austro-Hungarian officer and had only limited combat effectiveness. Six battalions were organized by the end of 1915 and they played a major role the last phase of the Albanian campaign. These troops did not need such a level of supply as the Austro-Hungarians, and the locals fed them voluntarily.

The Austro-Hungarian AOK lined up all available units for this campaign. The amount of units itself looked insufficient for a winter offensive in a mountainous terrain, but according to the force composition the Austro-Hungarians enjoyed certain advantages. One of the advantages was the good morale due to the recent victory over the Serbians. To understand the Austro-Hungarian capabilities a more detailed analysis necessary.

Equipment

The low defense spending in peacetime caused equipment problems which decisively influenced the capabilities of the army in the early stages of World War One. The most important was the rifle problem. The army had 2.5 million rifles and carbines but one third of them were modern 1895M, the rest of them were earlier versions less

capable and even with different ammunition.⁸⁸ The situation became even worst in the first year of the war when the produced weapons for Rumania and Mexico were confiscated and two other calibers increased the difficulties of the Austro-Hungarian supply system.⁸⁹ The first and second line units of the army was equipped by the basic 1895M rifles, but the third line units still had various types of hand weapons. By 1916 only the supporting arms used different calibers, all infantry units had the basic 1895M Mannlicher rifle. The same problem occurred with the battle uniforms. Old dark-blue equipment was issued to the third line infantry units and even so some unit used civilian clothing with an armband.⁹⁰ A new type of field-grey uniform was initiated by the army command in 1915, and the uniform problem was more or less solved by 1916. The basic machine gun was the 1907/12M 8mm Schwarzlose type, although older ones, like the 1889/1904M type, and 1908M Maxim and Bergmann types were also used.

The field artillery guns, mountain artillery howitzers and parts of the heavy artillery was considered modern, but more than 15 different caliber was in use which did not helped the efficiency of the logistics.⁹¹ The heavy artillery considered the most valuable assets of the whole army, the 30.5cm mortars and the 42cm howitzers were excellent weapons, one of the best in their categories. The mountain artillery also was modern, small and the peaces were easy to assemble after transportation. The majority of the third line units, which consisted the majority of the troops in the Balkans, still used

⁸⁸ Szíjj Jolán, 559.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 143.

⁹¹ Ibid., 752-756.

the pre-war obsolete field guns .The Austro-Hungarian army units were equipped poorly with numbers of artillery pieces according to a Great Power standard, but still much better than the smaller countries of the war.

Their equipment status was only comparable to the Italians in that part of the Balkans. The military industry was able to sustain the forces need in this particular period of the war. The equipment status generally provided an advance to the Austro-Hungarian forces over their contemporaries, with the exception of the Italians.

Organization

The overall army was infantry focused and the leadership considered them as decisive branch. A German, French or British infantry division consisted of 12 infantry battalions, while a Russian and Austro-Hungarian division had 16 battalions.⁹² Both eastern empires tried to balance the lack of artillery by the number of bayonets. Of course the Austro-Hungarian army organization was not so simple. Only the first line common army (K.u.K. units) had 16 battalions. The second line K.K. Landwehr and M.K. Honvéd infantry divisions had only 12 battalions. The first and second line units were fielded from the 18 to 33 year old population. The third line units K.K. Landsturm and M.K. Népfelkelő units were not organized into divisions, the highest organization was brigade. The third line brigades had four to twelve battalions and fielded from the 34 to 55 year old population. During the war the importance of the machine gun increased a lot. Austria-Hungary had only 902 machine guns in August 1914 for 685 battalions.⁹³ Some

⁹² Captain Jonathan M. House, *Towards Combined Arms Warfare* (Ft. Leavenworth KS: Combined Studies Institute, 1984), 10-11.

⁹³ Pilch Jenő, 208.

first line units had four machine guns per battalion, but the average was only two. The third line units were employed without a single machine gun. That lack of machine gun support caused the huge casualty rate in the early years of war. By 1916, the four machine guns per battalion became basic standard in the overall army.

Seven companies of cavalry participated in the campaign mostly as a reconnaissance and mobile reserve force. Majority of this force was part of the 1st M.K. Népfelkelő Huszár battalion, as a third line cavalry unit, and one platoon of the 1st Dalmatien Landeschützen Company, as a first line unit. They did not influence too much the fight, although they provided security and reconnaissance to the units.

The Austro-Hungarian artillery had a very interesting characteristic. In the beginning of the war the overall artillery had 464 batteries (field, mountain, heavy, and fortress guns and howitzers) with a total of 2,610 pieces.⁹⁴ The first and second line units had organic artillery units, but the third line had only improvised artillery batteries with obsolete equipment, and these batteries were used as brigade artillery. By 1916 the artillery grew to 804 batteries and 48 detachments with a total of 4,018 guns and howitzers.⁹⁵ The overall 3rd Army had 417 mobile and 530 standing pieces against less than 150 Montenegrin artillery pieces. This period of the war an average 24 to 36 artillery pieces per division was provided to the Austro-Hungarian forces. The brigades had three artillery batteries, the divisions additional six to nine batteries and the corps an artillery group with 6 to 13 batteries. The artillery unit structure provided an advantage over the Montenegrins and was comparable to the Italians.

⁹⁴ Pilch Jenő, 208-209; Jung, 8.

⁹⁵ Jung, 8.

The importance of engineer units were among the lessons not learned experiences, but the engineer units per division was equal to the average international trends.⁹⁶ Each infantry regiment had a small sapper detachment, and each infantry division had one sapper company and the first line units usually plus a pioneer company.⁹⁷ The overall army composition had 2.5 percent of engineers in 1914. This number increased of 5.6 percent by 1916.⁹⁸ They executed enormous amount of work due to the underdeveloped infrastructure of the battlefronts.

There were four air companies deployed to the Balkan theatre in 1915. The 6th company was a special naval aviation company. In the west-Balkans these air companies were able to have the air superiority and provide air reconnaissance for the land units. This support was a key to the success of the operation.

The Austro-Hungarian organization was more like the Russian army's organization, where the mass of infantry with 16 battalions per division dominate over the weak artillery. When the heavy artillery was able to mass its fire power the Austro-Hungarians had a considerable advantage over any other armies on the western Balkans. The artillery was that combat arms which really made a difference in this theatre.

Training and Experience

Due to the lack of wars by the Dual Monarchy, the Austro-Hungarian military attaches collected the different war experiences of other great powers. The Austro-

⁹⁶ House, 10-11.

⁹⁷ Szíjj Jolán, 700.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 482.

Hungarian military observers were present in every major war prior the World War One. Their reported experiences were not implemented; the only exception was the huge attrition rate and the usage of heavy artillery. The “marsch” unit system was created to provide the human resources in the attrition battles. Each regiment received a marsch company in every month of the war. This system proved its value after the bloody battles in the Eastern and Italian fronts. In conclusion the Austro-Hungarian army was poorly equipped and obsolete trained in the beginning of the war. By the end of 1915, due to the war experience the training issue was solved and the equipment issue was reduced.

Regarding to training the Austro-Hungarian war experiences were implemented the training and the forces had a reliable background. The advantage was on their side, while the Italians still used their pre-war methods and the Montenegrins lacked the experience about maneuver warfare.

Leadership and Command

The emperor Franz Joseph the First did not horn in to the military leadership’s job. He had some directives, but all military decisions made by his Chief of General Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf. He enjoyed the trust of the emperor and the Austro-Hungarian generals, although his decisions in the first year of the war were questioned. Inside the Austro-Hungarian Army was evident, what Conrad von Hötzendorf said would be executed. He was considered as a skillful tactician who could really make a difference although his ideas sometimes lacked the reality of the Austro-Hungarian Army’s

capabilities.⁹⁹ He was about to carry on his will through every difficulties even through the German chief of Staff will. His character provided a stable direction to this campaign.

The Austro-Hungarian leadership model copied the Prussian model. The unit commander had the overall responsibility, but the chief of staff had a major role in the staff work and planning. These two key personnel must work together well in order to be effective. The 3rd Army commander was General Hermann Kövess von Kövessháza, who was one of the most talented and most experienced commanders of the Austro-Hungarian army.¹⁰⁰ He was well respected and supported commander, so his appointment was based the good outcome of the campaign. General Theodor Konopiczky was the chief of staff of the 3rd Army. He was an experienced officer, commanded the 4th Mountain Brigade in 1915 and was selected to be and Army Chief of Staff. He always was considered a caring officer; his subordinates respected and liked him. They together constituted a successful team and led the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army during the Serbian, the Montenegrin-Albanian and later in the Trient offensives. Their leadership skills provided a good background for the Austro-Hungarian offensive.

The Austro-Hungarian small unit leaders had war experiences and enough agility to carry out a successful offensive. These characteristics gave them an overall advantage over all forces in the west-Balkan.

⁹⁹ Szíjj Jolán, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 384.

Sustainment

The supply system of the Austro-Hungarian forces operated well in 1915. The rear area provided the supply and the route was routinely executed. The general way of supply was the following. The arriving supply at first was received by the corps distribution station and they forwarded to the divisions. The division supplemented these supplies by local purchasing and using its own butchery. The division transported to the regiments the supplies by train-automobiles-carts. The regiment was responsible to provide fresh bread to the troops, so it had a field bakery. The final station was the company where the field kitchens operated and provided the food for the soldiers. The rare rail system made the supply difficult, but the experienced supply planners were able to execute their job. The lack of supply routes although slowed down the advance speed. The combatant-non-combatant ratio in the Austro-Hungarian Army was 70:30, but in extremely difficult terrain this ratio would change extremely like in the Tyrolean Front where seven non-combatants supplied one combatant. In the beginning of 1916 still the pre-war supply standards existed in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Every soldier had to receive 70 dkg bread, 40 dkg meat, two dkg grease, 10 dkg legumes, two pieces of coffee can, 10 pieces of cigarette. The horses required special attention and their portion was also standardized. A horse received five kg of oat and seven kg of hay. This standardization helped the supply system to operate efficiently.¹⁰¹ The main problem was the transport, especially in the mountainous areas like the Balkans.

The Austro-Hungarian logistic supply was close to the world standard. The Entente blockade had some effects, but the peace norms were still in use and most of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 149.

time provided to the soldiers. The logistic planners learned the hard way in the first year of the war their lessons and carefully planned the operation. The field commanders also learned to listen to their logisticians and in some cases the logistic considerations had a major influence in the operations.¹⁰² In 1916 the Austro-Hungarian logistic system was over its first shock and worked effectively at the troop level. The logisticians were aware of the importance of lines of communications and they had a good contact with the engineer branch, which generally was about to provide the logisticians requests.

The sustainment worked well in the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army and it gave them a significant advantage over the Montenegrins and in a certain degree over the Italians.

The Austro-Hungarian Navy

The Austro-Hungarian Navy had much more difficult situation than the Army. Austria-Hungary was a traditionally land based country and never had a large navy. However by 1914 a considerable navy was built up and it was the eight among the Great Powers. The numbers not shows the truth, while almost every Austro-Hungarian capital ship had reduced combat range and generally less capability than the other competing navies. It was due to the national debate between Austria and Hungary.¹⁰³ The Hungarian parliament approved only defensive purchases and most of the units really were only coastal defense unit. Almost miraculous how this navy was able to defend that coastline, but they did. The capital ships hardly left their ports, due to the fleet in being doctrine. The cruiser fleet had a considerable influence although. Four modern small cruisers and

¹⁰² NémethJózsef, 52.

¹⁰³ Szíjj Jolán, 246.

18 torpedo destroyers meant that “sea cavalry” which was fast, agile and effective through the whole war. The small cruisers had the same characteristics, supreme speed, average armor and small caliber artillery. The torpedo destroyers although had supreme speed and adequate artillery with the most modern torpedoes. The six *Tatra class* torpedo destroyers proved to be the most useful ships of the entire fleet. The submarine fleet had the biggest impact on the war, but in the end of 1915 it was extremely weak. Only 12 submarines were available and two of them were obsolete and hardly to be used as training vessels. The rest of them had reduced cruising radius so the influence of these submarines was only in the Adriatic-Sea and the Ionian-Sea from Greece to the Bay of Taranto.

The Austro-Hungarian Navy’s organization followed the international standard regarding to divisions and flotillas. The same could be said about the training, although the experiences were different. The Dual Monarchy’s naval operations were small scale and usually avoided the direct engagements with other fleets. The small ships and the submarine crews were proficient and experienced. The naval leadership was passive in admiral level, but the lower level officers had the agility and the ability to be successful. The problem was the size of the navy did not allow the losses and under this pressure the decisions were usually cautious. The supply of the navy was quite good especially considering the torpedoes.¹⁰⁴

A naval operation was ordered to support the Montenegrin-Albanian campaign in order to prevent the Serbian Army’s withdrawal by sea and support the land offensive of Mount Lovcen. The forces designated to this operation consisted of the 5th Battleship

¹⁰⁴ Szíjj Jolán, 439.

division (SMS Monarch, SMS Wien, SMS Budapest—with 4 x 24cm main guns), and the 2nd Cruiser division (SMS Kaiser Karl VI, SMS Kaiser Franz Joseph I, SMS Navara, SMS Aspern, SMS Panther), a torpedo division (SMS Warasdiner, SMS Huszár, SMS Orjen, SMS Turul, SMS Blitz, 16 x torpedo boats), four minesweeper and five submarines. In addition to this force other torpedo-destroyers and cruiser could be involved to the campaign as well as the German Navy submarines in Cattaro.

The Austro-Hungarian Navy successfully defended the country's coastline and was able to provide valid support to the ground offensive. The Entente Powers naval superiority was obvious in the southern Adriatic but due to their speed the cruiser fleet had a chance to successfully disrupt the Serbian Army's evacuation from Albania through the sea. A big disadvantage was the sensibility towards the losses, which could impact the execution of every naval task. The submarine fleet was active and useful, but their ability to control large areas was poor. The usage of land based naval aviation was a huge advantage of the Austro-Hungarian fleet as well as the mine warfare. Based on the force ratios and the available forces the success of the naval operation in the Albanian coast was not so likely.

In conclusion the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army had sufficient combat power and to defeat Montenegro and continue the offensive in Albania. They lacked the combat power although for the simultaneous offensive, which would lead to capture the Serbian forces in Albania. The decision of executing these two operations one after another provided extra time to the Serbians. The troops had high morale and good support which promote them to be successful in this campaign. The navy could influence the events, but the

higher activity would focus the entire Entente Fleet attention to the Adriatic coastline, which certainly was considered as avoidable consequence.

Time Available

The Central Powers fought in the inner circle and whenever they had an offensive in one front, the Entente Powers launched an offensive in a different front to draw forces out from the Central Powers' main effort. It was the case during the Battle of Gorlicze, when the British launched an offensive in the western front and the Italians opened their new front. The reaction time was various, but a good summary would be roughly one month. The Russian forces were still in bad shape and they were capable only to launch limited offensive on the Eastern front. The Italians had problems as well. After four unsuccessful offensives on the Italian front a major reorganization started end of 1915 and it took three months to be ready launching a new one. The Austro-Hungarians did not know the details, but they were informed about the Italian problems. The Western Front did not affect the Austro-Hungarian forces nor the Salonika-Gallipoli front. Only the Russian counter-offensive was worrying, but that takes at least one month preparation time and probably the situation is stable enough to hold the line and keep the units on the Balkan.

The AOK had its own plan as well. Conrad von Hötzendorf was about to launch an offensive to knock out Italy from the war. He planned this offensive not earlier than March, so the 3rd Army had seven weeks before the AOK started to draw forces from this theatre.

So, the 3rd Army had seven weeks until the strategic situation may draw forces from them. The defeat of Montenegro looked certain, but the Albanian operation would require more time.

The difficult terrain and the unfriendly weather conditions also caused some problems. The original plan declared the first day of the operation as January 2nd, 1916. The 3rd Army's troops were not able to reach the readiness by that time but more importantly the supply for this offensive was not available. Due to the transport problems the offensive was delayed to January 5th. This delay did not help the Army's leadership to finish this operation on time. As it happened later the AOK ordered some divisions to leave the Balkans in mid February, which did not helped the execution.

Civil Considerations

The planners that time period did not focused on too much on the civilian factor. There are some sources after the campaign which let us see how Austro-Hungarian officials saw the locals and how they addled them.

Montenegro

The population of Montenegro was roughly 370,000 in 1915. A report prior the Balkan Wars listed the following main cities. Cetinje as capital city had 4,500, Podgoritsa 10,000, Dulcigno 5,000, Nikshitye 5,000, and Antivari 2,530 inhabitants. The Montenegrins were ethnically South-Slavic and technically they were considered as Serbians. They are utilizing the Cyrillic alphabet. The population was mainly pastoral and agricultural. The religion was orthodox, and the religious head of the country was called

Vladika.¹⁰⁵ They were considered as the small brother of the Serbians but they maintained a high level of pride, whenever Serbia tried to influence their sovereignty. They were reliable allies although and the brotherhood was an existing feeling among these two nations.

The people of Montenegro showed a strong spirit of patriotism during the pre-war era. It was the reason why the militia system worked so efficiently for this small country. As soon as a war or conflict happened, even the emigrants returned home and reported for duty.

The war was exhausting and the poor economy was not able to provide enough supply for the fight so they required foreign support. The population lacked some goods and their nutrition was quite bad. The Austro-Hungarian forces were more welcome like their presence meant better supply. The Austro-Hungarian leadership expected a high level of resistance among the population as in Serbia, but that was not the case in Montenegro during this campaign. Other effect was the lack of local supply, when an area was captured; the attackers just ate what they brought with them.

Albania

The major ethnic group of the country was the Albanian. The Albanian and Turkish population formed one group and they consisted the 90 percent of the country. They still maintained the tribal system, but in the lowlands around the cities that system had fewer effects. The second largest ethnic group was the Greek. They were considered the most educated nation in the country, although the tensions between them and the

¹⁰⁵ War Office General Staff, 4.

Albanians were high. Bulgarian-Macedonian population lived in the eastern-Albanian territories. This tribal and multi-ethnic environment did not support the idea of nation state.

Albanians generally liked the Austro-Hungarians. It was well known, the existence of the country was decided by the request of the Dual Monarchy. The Austro-Hungarian forces could count a warm welcome, but no supply due to the countries low infrastructure level and the retreating Serbian forces possible effect—looting. There were some Pro-Serbian Albanian tribes as well. They were in minority, but some tribes considered the Austro-Hungarians as enemy.

The Austro-Hungarian forces must have been cautious about the local Albanians, they could support each side.

Summary

As a conclusion, Austria-Hungary provided enough combat power for the 3rd Army to be successful in the laTolnaind operation. The success on the sea was always was miraculous for the Central Powers, but the sea interdiction was the task, which the submarines could execute the best. The enemy's morale was low, but prepared for defense. The terrain was extremely difficult and the winter is usually rainy-snowy, which increased the problems. The lack of infrastructure increased the physical demands on the infantry forces, but made the logisticians life miserable too.

The extended logistical supply lines prevent the Austro-Hungarian forces to mass combat power against the Italian defense lines in southern Albania. The Austro-Hungarians had knowledge about the west-Balkan's poor infrastructure and the difficulties it could cause. The decision was to launch a winter campaign, which had

always a risk of the difficult weather condition, especially in mountainous terrain. The defeat of Montenegro opened the way to Albania from the north. The first obstacle was Montenegro itself, because this tiny country had small improved road network which was not connected to the Austro-Hungarian port of Cattaro. The first task was to connect the road network to Cattaro, but due to the rough terrain only a small hardly trafficable road was built, which needed continuous maintenance. A cable cart system was established from Cattaro to Cetinje to have supplementary lines of communication. This solution made the supply situation satisfactory in the whole Montenegro and south till Skutari. Northern Albania had much poorer infrastructure and only the cable cart system could solve the problem. The Austro-Hungarian engineers hastily set up the lines from town to town in the shortest possible way through marshes, rivers, hilltops and valleys. It was the only reliable transport system till mid 1917, when a field railway was implemented from Durazzo to the Vojusa River. In the meantime the conventional ground transportation must be maintained as well, so the engineers were occupied to improve roads and set up bridges. The Mediterranean winter is extremely wet and the melting snow increased the level of the rivers, which usually brushed the hastily set up bridges. Each lost bridge meant one or two days delay on the supply system and the troops suffered a lot because of hunger. The local supply purchase was impossible because of the Serbian Army's looting and the local population hardly had anything to feed themselves. The capturing of Durazzo helped a situation a bit, while a big port was able to receive more supplies, but this shortened supply lines were still long. A ground movement took two weeks to reach the Vojusa River from Durazzo in good weather conditions. The supply arrived to Durazzo through the sea, where the Entente had superiority and often blocked these lines

for days. A modern Army was a helpless mass of man without proper supply and this dependence of supply just increased over the last one century. The Austro-Hungarian forces started their offensive on January 5th, 1916 and seized Durazzo on February 27th, 1916. Almost two months of advance in extremely harsh condition with falter supply system the culmination was evident by mid March 1916. When the advancing troops arrived to the Italian defense lines they were rather happy to halt and rest, than execute an assault against the Italians. Even after the situation was stabilized in Albania, this frontline duty offered the most difficulties to the Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

CHAPTER 4

MONTENEGRIN OPERATION

This chapter focuses on the Montenegrin operation. The previous chapters discussed the background and context of this campaign. After the initial preparation the Montenegrin operation was launched on January 5th, 1916.¹⁰⁶ The advancing Austro-Hungarian forces faced generally less resistance than it was expected and in a week the Montenegrins were defeated. The difficulties started later on with the cease fire negotiations on January 14th, 1916 and extended for two weeks the time when the offense generally was halted. The formal cease fire agreement which ended this operation was signed on January 25th, 1916.¹⁰⁷

As a detailed analysis, this chapter will examine the following questions. How did the Austro-Hungarian Navy support the land operations? How did the Austro-Hungarian Forces fail to prevent the Serbian forces from withdraw from Albania? How did this operation set the conditions for the following Albanian campaign?

Planning of the Montenegrin Operation

The Central Powers started planning follow-on operations after the victory over the Serbians became obvious in November 1915. The German and the Austro-Hungarian Chief of General staffs had signed an agreement about a unified plan in the Balkan

¹⁰⁶ Major General Lord Edward Gleichen, *Chronology of the Great War*, vol. 2 (London: Greenhill Books, 1988), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Nyáry Iván, Magyar Katonai Közlöny 1934/4, *Adatok Montenegro fegyverletételéhez* [Hungarian Military Review 4/1934, Datas about the cease fire agreement with Montenegro] (M.Kir. Honvédelmi Minisztérium, 1934), 220.

Theatre. According to this plan General August von Mackensen would lead the entire operation with the same forces used in the Serbian campaign with the addition of the Bulgarian 2nd Army. The main axis of advance would be the Skopje–Thessaloniki for the 11th German and for the 1st Bulgarian Armies. The left flank would be provided by the Bulgarian 2nd Army and the right flank by the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army.¹⁰⁸ The battle of Kostrino was one well executed step of this plan, when the Bulgarian 2nd Army defeated the British forces 6 to 12 December 1915. This victory forced the Entente forces back to Greece, but the Central Powers' offensive stopped on the Greek border. Germany wanted to honor the neutrality of Greece despite of the fact that the Entente Powers already violated Greek sovereignty. The other members of the Central Powers just did not understand why. Conrad von Hötzendorf wrote a quite unfriendly telegram to Erich von Falkenhayn to ask explanation and inform him about the planning session already made by them on December 16th, 1915. Three days later the answer had arrived back with the same manner. Falkenhayn explained that he intended to move 8 divisions from the Balkans and two from East-Galicia to the western front. He furthermore argued that the earliest time to start a new campaign in the Balkans would be the fall of 1916. Furthermore he requested Conrad to send two Austro-Hungarian divisions to the Eastern Front replacing German forces supporting the common war efforts. Falkenhayn also warned Conrad not to task directly General Kövess, because that could endanger the flank of the Army Group Mackensen.¹⁰⁹ After this clear message Conrad pulled all Austro-Hungarian forces in the Balkan from von Mackensen's subordination from

¹⁰⁸ von Horstenau et al., 3:597.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 599.

December 20th, 1915. These forces were under General Kövess von Kövessháza and the operational planning session started for the Montenegrin campaign.



Figure 4. Situation of the West-Balkans on 1 January 1916

Source: Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, and Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918* [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 4:1.

Major General Theodor Konopicky was the Chief of Staff of the 3rd Austro-Hungarian Army and he led the planning. He received the first warning order from Conrad von Hötzendorf on December 16th, 1915. The order arrived along with instructions to separate from the Mackensen Army Group.¹¹⁰ They were authorized to

¹¹⁰ von Horstenau et al., 4:33.

coordinate with the Bulgarians, but only through the Mackensen Army Group. The 3rd Army received two main directions for attack. The first was from Cattaro through Mount Lovcen to Podgorica and Virpazar. The second direction was from Berane and Djakova towards Podgorica and Skutari.¹¹¹ The terrain did not offer other options due to the rough mountainous border and poor road network. The first direction offered the best chance for success, but that was the most heavily defended as well. The general problem was how to mass firepower and create a good force concentration. The northern and the eastern front of Montenegro lacked the infrastructure to regroup the forces and even to supply them. Only Cattaro provided a good port capacity with a rail connection, but even that rail line was a small gauge one and the port was under observation of the Montenegrins.

The 3rd Army commander issued his operational order on December 24th, 1915.¹¹² The western group consisted of the XIX Corps and the forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina under the command of General Stephan Sarkotic. The XIX Corps received the task to lead the attack from Cattaro to Podgorica under the command of General Ignaz Trollmann. The forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina were to execute small scale attacks from Trebinje and Bielek towards Niksic. The 62nd Division was to serve as flank security. The rest of the 3rd Army was to fall under General Viktor Scheuchenstuel and the VIII Corps. The VIII Corps had the task to advance in the secondary axis of advance from Berane to Podgorica, least with three brigade strength. The 57th Division received the task to be prepared to advance towards Skutari.¹¹³ The fifth battleship division of the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 3:597.

¹¹² Feldmarschallleutnant Theodor Konopicky.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Austro-Hungarian Navy was also subordinated to Kövess in order to support this operation.



Figure 5. The Plan of the Montenegrin Operation

Source: Feldmarschallleutnant Theodor Konopicky, *Die Niederwerfung Montenegros* [The defeat of Montenegro], accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.wintersonnenwende.com/scriptorium/deutsch/archiv/weltkampf/wer0518.html>.

The 3rd Army was in a precarious situation due to the relations with the other Central Powers' forces. They had enough combat power to deal with the Montenegrins,

but due to their previous experience the Austro-Hungarians did not devote any force for the secondary task—pursue the Serbians. The Serbian forces were to be pursued by minor Bulgarian forces until they reached Elbasan.¹¹⁴ This operation had the potential to defeat Montenegro, but due to the missing support from the other Central Powers, the follow-on operation was still questionable. The Austro-Hungarian forces needed to defeat Montenegro as soon as possible in order to prevent the Serbian forces' evacuation and complete the victory in the West-Balkans. Later the lost ground contact with the Serbians resulted the advancing units never was able to capture larger Serbian formations and the retreating forces always had two days advance.

Preparations for the Operation

The subordinates of the 3rd Army received the operation order on December 24th, 1915. They had 10 days to be prepared for the execution. The troops received their march units and reorganized themselves. Minor reinforcements arrived as well as elements of the 1st Népfelkelő Hussar Squadron.¹¹⁵ The biggest effort required the movement of the artillery. In addition to the organic artillery, the Austro-Hungarian general staff ordered some heavy artillery units to Cattaro. The biggest artillery piece was a 42cm mortar, which was fixed to rail carts. The difference between rail gauges plus the sea transport through the bay of Cattaro was a huge work for the artillery and the

¹¹⁴ Vitéz Tiszabeői Hellenbroth Antal, *A magyar tüzér* [The Hungarian Artilleryman] (Budapest: Reé László könyvkiadó és terjesztő vállalat, 1939), 235.

¹¹⁵ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, *A M.Kir. 1. budapesti Honvéd Huszár Ezred és 1. M.Kir. Népfelkelő Huszár Osztály története 1867-1918* [The history of the Royal Hungarian 1st Honved Hussar Regiment and 1st Népfelkelő Hussar Squadron] (Budapest, 1927), Part 2, 45.

engineers.¹¹⁶ This heavy artillery pieces provided that essential element of fire power, which was able to destroy the heavily fortified Montenegrin artillery positions. The two attacking corps' organic artillery units and the naval artillery had only small caliber howitzers and naval guns with low angle shooting capability, much less effective against fortified artillery positions.

The Austro-Hungarian Navy made preparation as well. The coastal bombardment was not a new task for them. After Italy joined to the Entente the Austro-Hungarian Navy executed a large scale coastal bombardment task. Those targets were not as high as the targets in the Mount Lovcen so they invented a solution to aim so high. The ships let water into their bunkers in one side of the ship and in this way they were able to reach the high elevation targets. Firing to high elevation brought up other problems with the fire direction. Due to the long distances naval officers from the port were not able to observe the hits and signal back to the ships. The solution was the 6th naval air squadron, which developed a new method of fire observation during the preparation time.¹¹⁷

The biggest problem was logistics. After the Serbian campaign all units in the north and the east were short of supplies. The Sarajevo–Cattaro railroad was used for supporting the Western group. The northern and eastern groups needed to supply by another way. The Serbian Belgrad-Nis railway lacked the branch lines; so engineer units needed to build up field railroad. The operation was planned to start on January 2nd,

¹¹⁶ Vitéz Tiszabeői Hellenbroth Antal, 238.

¹¹⁷ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 102.

1916, but the forces were not ready. Logistics was one of the key issues for delaying the offensive to January 5th, 1916.¹¹⁸

The Austro-Hungarian leadership soon became aware of the Serbian attempt to evacuate through Albania and also the Entente plan to reinforce Montenegro. The Entente Powers sent supplies to the Montenegrins through the port of San Giovanni di Medua. The first reaction of the Austro-Hungarian Navy was to initiate a reconnaissance patrol to the Albanian ports on November 22nd, 1915. After this time, the submarines received the task to patrol in the Albanian coast to control the naval traffic. The submarines reported all enemy naval activity and checked the merchant traffic, even by stopping and going onboard. Naval airplanes also executed reconnaissance missions. One brilliant naval raid was executed by Captain Miklós Horthy leading the light cruiser *SMS Navara*, four torpedo destroyers and three torpedo boats on December 5th, 1915. This raid sunk all merchant ships inside the port of San Giovanni di Medua and destroyed the storages in the city.¹¹⁹ During this mission they also transported agents to Albania equipped with messenger pigeons in order to observe the Serbian forces and to prepare the Albanians for the arrival of the Austro-Hungarian forces. The cruiser fleet executed a second raid on December 6th, 1915, when the *SMS Helgoland* and *SMS Saida* with six torpedo destroyers entered to Durazzo. There they sunk four Albanian and one Italian transport ship and afterwards laid mines in front of San Giovanni di Medua.

¹¹⁸ Nyári Iván, *A Montenegrói fegyverszüneti tárgyalások hatása a hadműveletekre* [The Montenegrin cease fire negotiations' effect on the operations], Hungarian Military Archives, 1.

¹¹⁹ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 92.

The demand for an increased fleet activity, the Austro-Hungarian navy repositioned the *SMS Helgoland* and three torpedo destroyers to Cattaro on December 20th, 1915; to be closer the future battle scene, the Albanian coast. The agents reported a 300 strong Italian force landed in Durazzo escorted by smaller warships; and the Austro-Hungarian navy decided to react. A group led by *SMS Helgoland* with five torpedo destroyer was designated to execute this operation. The group sunk the French submarine *FS Monge* on the way to Durazzo, but the reported warships were not found. The group sunk two transport ships and attempted to leave. The withdrawing *SMS Lika* and *SMS Triglav* torpedo destroyers run to mines. *SMS Lika* had major damages and soon sunk, but the *SMS Triglav* would be repaired. The remaining two torpedo destroyer initiated towing the damaged *SMS Triglav*, but they wasted too much time and the Entente fleet was on the way. The Austro-Hungarian fleet in Cattaro was also alerted and an armored cruiser was on the way to help this flotilla. Their route back to Cattaro became a legendary escape. Two British, two Italian cruisers, with nine Allied torpedo destroyers were ordered to capture and sink the Austro-Hungarian flotilla. As soon as the Entente ships were seen, the *SMS Triglav* scuttled and the remaining Austro-Hungarian ships prepared for battle. The Austro-Hungarian fleet had superior speed, but due to their numbers and fire power the Entente fleet had the advantage. The Austro-Hungarian fleet after some small engagements successfully escaped suffering minor damages.

The Austro-Hungarian fleet activity had some consequences. Primarily the Austro-Hungarian fleet lost two of their six best torpedo destroyers and the navy leadership became wary of further action. Furthermore Admiral Anton Haus relieved

from his position the flotilla commander, Linien Schiff Kapitän Heinrich Seitz.¹²⁰ This act was extremely unpopular among the navy commanders and did not support the aggressiveness of the fleet. On the Entente side this battle had some consequences as well. The coordination among the Entente fleet commanders became stronger and the flotilla in Brindisi was reinforced. Due to the long and obvious naval routes, the Entente naval commanders did not feel safe enough the naval evacuation to Italy. The use Korfu, as an intermediate station proved to be a brilliant idea and surprised all Austro-Hungarian naval leaders. This step reduced the sea travel time from four hours to one and they were able to use fewer ships with bigger efficiency and security.¹²¹ This battle reduced the agility of the K.u.K. Navy and the further part of the campaign the land units did not received too much support from the sea.

The XIX Corps was in a favorable situation as long as they had local forces who knew the terrain. These locals were used as guide and were augmented to each battalion.¹²² All units had some rest before the offensive and that paid off during the attack among the snow covered mountains. The final preparation was the artillery registration fire of the XIX Corps supporting units on January 4th, 1916. That did not cause any surprise to the Montenegrins, while artillery duels continuously occurred during the two first years of World War One. The Austro-Hungarian supporting heavy artillery had two pieces of 42cm mortar, five batteries of 30.5cm mortar, two batteries of

¹²⁰ Paul G. Harpen, *Naval wWar in the Mediterranean 1914-18* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 214.

¹²¹ von Horstenau et al., 3:580.

¹²² Dr. Beyer Ede t. százados, *Harmincas Honvédek élete a halálmezőkön* [The thirtieth Honvéd's life in the fields of dead] (Hungária Nyomda, Kecskemét, 1939).

24cm mortar, 11 batteries of 15cm howitzers, three of 15cm guns; all together 31 heavy artillery pieces plus the naval artillery. This amount of artillery provided the necessary fire superiority for the attackers.

The Montenegrins had problems with the preparations. Their supplies in San Giovanni di Medua were totally destroyed and they were short in food and ammunition. They knew the Austro-Hungarian offensive will start soon, but they were not sure when. The Montenegrin forces tried to have active defense and disturb the Austro-Hungarian preparations with small scale attacks.¹²³ For example, on December 27th, 1915 a company size element executed a raid near Sv. Gjorgjo and caused 60 casualties among the Austro-Hungarian forces.

The Austro-Hungarian forces over time learned to respect the Montenegrins ability to use the terrain and their fighting spirit. Everyone expected a tough fight with the Montenegrins. The preparations of the land forces were successful, all units reached the readiness and they just waited the sign for the start. On the other hand the shaping naval operations were halted just before their assistance was really needed.

The Demonstration

The Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army initiated the offensive from the east and northeast to turn the attention of the Montenegrins to that area and tight their reserves. The VIII Corps started the attack on January 5th, 1916. The 59th Division had the corps' main direction, from the border to Berane and towards Podgorica. On the left flank of the VIII Corps, the 9th Mountain Brigade joined to the attack from Ipek to Andrijevisa. The

¹²³ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 706.

right flank of the VIII Corps the 53rd Division launched the attack in the Lim and Tara rivers' valley towards Podgorica. The 62nd Division also joined to the right flank offensive.¹²⁴ The 57th Division received the task to reach the positions of Djakova–Prizren in the west of Kosovo in order to threaten the rear of the Montenegrins and set conditions for the further Albanian advance.

The 59th Division and the right flank 9th Mountain Brigade met the Montenegrin Vasojevic Group (4600 man, 14 guns) and the Serbian Combined Group (two infantry regiments, four guns). These Austro-Hungarian troops reached their first offensive, the Berane-Andrejevina line by January 10th, 1916. But then, the Montenegrin resistance became stronger and these troops halted.¹²⁵ The 57th Division in west-Kosovo reached its position by January 8th, 1916.

South of the 62nd Division on the right flank of VIII Corps met much bigger resistance. Major General Reinöhl led the Austro-Hungarian troops that had three battalions from the 205th Landsturm Brigade and three battalions from the Royal Hungarian 6th Népfelkelő regiments maneuver forces. These forces belonged to two different divisions but to have a unified command the commander of 205th Landsturm Brigade took command. This attack is known as battle of Majkovac. The opposing forces were led by General Serdar Janko Vukotic and he commanded the Sandjak group. This group had 6500 man and 25 guns.¹²⁶ The Austro-Hungarian forces advanced toward the Tara River on January 5th, 1916 and secured the heights on the east side of the riverbank.

¹²⁴ vitéz Czékus Zoltán, 264.

¹²⁵ von Horstenau et al., 4:41.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 39.

The following day they assaulted the Montenegrin defensive positions. The three battalions of the 6th Népfelkelő Regiment seized a mountain-saddle north-east of Majkovac in the morning hours. The Montenegrin reserve forces counter-attacked and using their positional advantage pushed back the Austro-Hungarian forces. On January 7th, 1916, the same regiment attacked again and occupied key terrain southeast of Majkovac. This time they were able to hold their position, but due to the heavy casualties they retreated to the east bank of the river. The Austro-Hungarians suffered 2000 casualties and they were forced to reorganize these forces.¹²⁷ This battle showed the Montenegrin fighting spirit and the necessity of fire preparation. The Montenegrin forces successfully used the terrain, but they suffered heavy casualties also and they were not able to launch the counter-offensive.

The Austro-Hungarian VIII Corps successfully fixed the Montenegrin Sandjak Group and threatened Podgorica from the east. This situation created the condition for the western group to launch their offensive.

Battle of Mount Lovcen

The Austro-Hungarian main effort was the western group under the command of General Stefan Sarkotic. He organized his forces to three subordinate commands. They started the artillery preparation of the offense on January 8th, 1916. On the left flank, brigade size elements launched their offense against the Montenegrin “Herzegovinian group” from Bilek and Trebinje. The left flank offensive, together with the VIII Corps attack fixed all Montenegrin forces and the Montenegrin Lovcen Group generally fought

¹²⁷ Milovan Djilas, *Land Without Justice* (New York, Harcourt, 1958), 612.

without the hope of reinforcement. The artillery preparation was quite effective. As the Montenegrin batteries were destroyed, their infantry generally fought without fire support. The Austro-Hungarian infantry launched the offense under the cover of the artillery. The 47th Division received the task to seize Mount Lovcen, while the group Sorsich attacked on the right flank near the Adriatic Sea and the Brigade Zhuber on the left flank. These land units were supported by the 5th Battleship Division from the Bay of Cattaro and from the Adriatic Sea.

One old battleship, two armored cruisers, two small cruisers and two torpedo destroyers provided naval fire support under the command of rear admiral Alexander Hanza. Each ship received a supported unit and a target area. Due to the Montenegrin counter fire, the ships need to relocate regularly which made the fire direction more difficult. The small cruiser *SMS Aspern* and the torpedo destroyer *SMS Huszár* supported the assault of group Sorsich on the coast. The fire of these ships were so successful, the attacking group only lost eight dead and 32 wounded.¹²⁸ Rest of the ships fired from the Bay of Cattaro. The Battleship *SMS Budapest* executed counter battery fire against the Mount Babjak and Mount Krstac batteries. The armored cruiser *SMS Kaiser Karl VI* fired counter battery fire against the Mount Lovcen batteries. The defended cruiser *SMS Kaiser Franz Joseph I* supported brigade Zhuber on the left flank. The small cruiser *SMS Panther* and the torpedo destroyer *SMS Warasdiner* were responsible for denying traffic on the serpentine road of Mount Lovcen. The ships started the fire support task at 0723.¹²⁹ The infantry assault started at 0900, met with heavy Montenegrin infantry

¹²⁸ Csonkaréti Károly, *Hadtörténelmi közlemények 1989/1*, 41.

¹²⁹ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 102.

resistance and machine gun fire. By the nightfall the left flank was still in the original positions, the center had reached the bottom of the mountain and the right flank forces had occupied the Grabovac height after 3 to 4 kilometers' advance.¹³⁰ Heavy rains made the infantry's life miserable, but on the Mont Lovcen the rain turned to snow. By the end of this day the majority of Montenegrin artillery was destroyed or had run out of ammunition. The Austro-Hungarian infantry had gained some terrain on the coastline and reached the mountain on the center. The situation was promising.

¹³⁰ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 707.

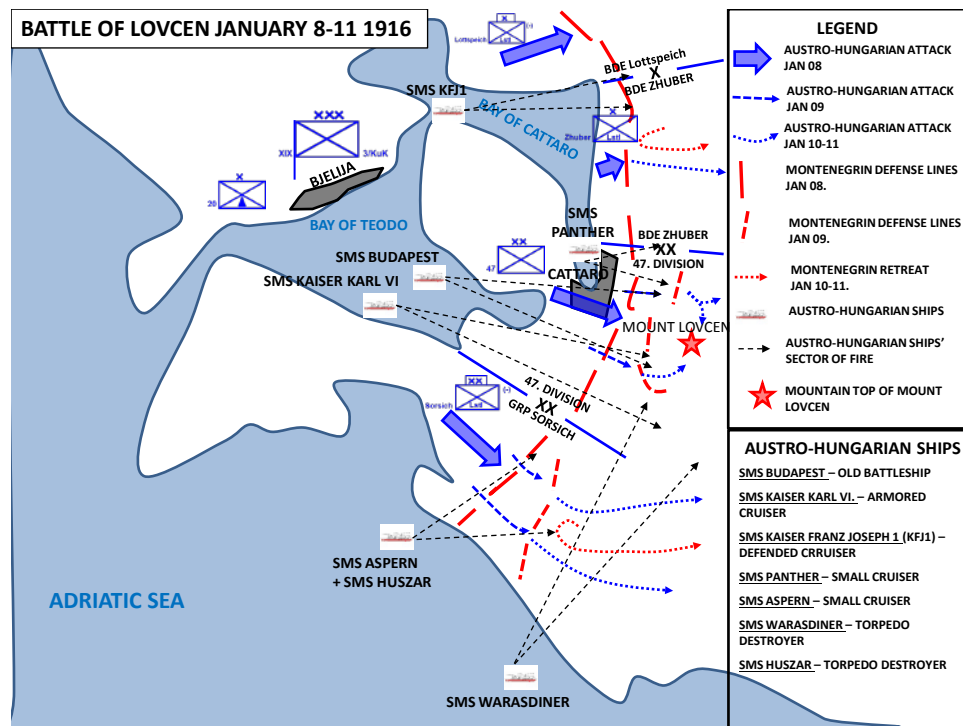


Figure 6. Battle of Lovcen

Source: By author, based on: Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnrl, and Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, vol 4, Beilage 3 [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918 vol 4. Annex 3] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 1; Bárány György, *Hadihajóink részvétele a Lovcen bevételénél*, Hadtörténelmi közlemények, 1919-20 [Our navy's participation by seizing Mount Lovcen, Military History Periodicals, 1919-21] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1921).

The following day started with a massive artillery preparation at 0600.¹³¹The infantry assault gain more terrain. The left flank still struggled with the Montenegrin defense and the snowy ridgeline. At the center the smaller mountain tops fall one by one into the Austro-Hungarians' hands. The right flank advanced towards the heights of Pricisia Glava, but they could not seize it by nightfall. The fights continued during the

¹³¹ von Horstenau et al., 4:49.

night as well. The fights of this day continuously pushed back the Montenegrin defense lines on the center and the right flank, while the left flank became more isolated. By the late afternoon the Montenegrin munitions situation became critical and a report was sent to King Nikola, which said without munitions and further troops the defense was hopeless.¹³²

On the 10th the fire support became extremely risky due to the close distance between friendly and enemy lines. The navy ceased its fire support task and only the XIX Corps artillery supported the assault. On the left flank the Austro-Hungarian forces encircled the heroic defenders, but due to the difficult terrain and the snow, these heights were not seized. At the center, only the mountain top was not seized by nightfall. On the right flank the assault against Pricisia Glava heights finally succeeded and these troops almost reached in the rear of the enemy. During the night a volunteer group assaulted the mountain top and they seized it.¹³³

On January 11th, 1916, the XIX Corps continue their advance while the reserve units secured Mount Lovcen. The fall of Mount Lovcen had an extreme effect on the Montenegrin army. Their morale collapsed and the Austro-Hungarian offensive gain terrain in every direction. The road from Cattaro to Cetinje (the Montenegrin capital) was open.

¹³² Ibid., 50.

¹³³ vitéz Doromby József, *A magyar gyalogság* [The Hungarian infantry] (Budapest: Reé László könyvkiadó és terjesztő vállalat, 1943), 261.

Advance to the Montenegrin Capital and the Cease Fire Negotiations

On January 11th, 1916 at 1200, the 47th Division reported the seizure of Mount Lovcen and the arrival of a Montenegrin delegation. Major Christo Janovic and First Lieutenant Popovic presented a cease fire request from King Nikola.¹³⁴ The request offered the immediate cease fire of both parties and a negotiation about the timeframe. The request was forwarded to the Austro-Hungarian general staff and the answer arrived back at 2315. The Austro-Hungarians accepted only the unconditional surrender, which was also to include the Serbian troops in Montenegro. General Konopicky, the Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army reported some conditions which would be necessary to consider for a possible final agreement. The Austro-Hungarian troops were to be granted free passage through Montenegro, the K.u.K. was to be supported operating supply bases in Montenegro if required, and the Montenegrin ships of Lake Skutari as well as the telecommunication equipments would be available for Austro-Hungarian forces.¹³⁵

The Austro-Hungarian forces continued the offensive but they had some difficulties. Strangely, these difficulties were not caused by the opposing forces, but the infrastructure. The advancing elements had wait until the supply columns could catch them as the local resources were extremely poor. On January 13th, 1916 the Montenegrin capital fell. That day, at 2225, the Austro-Hungarian general staff received the letter of King Nikola, and he offered his surrender and he request from Kaiser Franz Joseph light

¹³⁴ Nyári Iván, *A Montenegrói fegyverszüneti tárgyalások hatása a hadműveletekre*, 2.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3.

terms. At 2340, a telegram was sent to the 3rd Army, which clarified the operation continuing until further notice.¹³⁶

After the Montenegrins were considered defeated, the main focus of Austria-Hungary was on the Serbian forces. Still the evacuation had not started yet and with a fast advance the evacuation would be disrupted. The Montenegrin–Serbian relationships prevented the forced surrender of Serbian forces, so these fighting troops left Montenegro as the negotiations started. The Serbians still needed time to shift their forces to the safer southern Albanian ports, so the Montenegrins had to gain some time.

On January 15th the official offer arrived from the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister baron István Burián. A delegation was formed from officers, led by Major Gyula Martisevich and he gave the documents to the Montenegrins at 1120 near Cetinje. In the meantime the Austro-Hungarian intelligence collected the information about the Montenegrin retreat. Along the Tara River the lines were still hold so the Eastern situation did not change at all. The northern and western areas were abandoned and all troops moved towards the Lake Skutari. According to the Austro-Hungarian intelligence, that time in Port Skutari three Montenegrin battalions stationed with Serbian Army units. The Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army commander approved a plan to disrupt the Serbians this day at 2222. According to this plan a small task force was set up with two infantry battalions and a mountain battery and send to Skutari along the coastline. Their task was to seize the port and deny the embarkation. An Infantry Brigade was also planned to

¹³⁶ Ibid., 3.

follow that task force, but due to the current pursue task that took time to reorganize.¹³⁷

The same day the Serbian army first units were evacuated to Korfu.¹³⁸

On January 16th, 1916, at 1130, a Montenegrin committee arrived to the 47th Division at Cetinje. The Montenegrin government accepted the terms and informed the Austro-Hungarian government the Serbian troops had left Montenegro, only small numbers of wounded were in hospitals. The committee requested this message to be sent to Vienna. The Austro-Hungarian troops continued the offensive but on the narrow roads and the bad weather slow them down. The Montenegrins switched to guerilla warfare on the west to delay the advance, but many of them chose to surrender.¹³⁹ These fighting elements surrendered after the negotiations finished.

The following day the Austro-Hungarian General Staff authorized the 47th Division to settle the terms of surrender with the Montenegrin government. According to the demands the Montenegrins would put down their weapons by brigade in the designated locations, the Austro-Hungarian prisoners of wars would be released, the Montenegrin soldiers would be held as POWs until the negotiations ended and finally the 3rd Army would occupy and administer in the country. The same order put in effect the cease fire from January 17th, 1916 at 1900, till January 21st. The Austro-Hungarian

¹³⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁸ Gleichen, 9.

¹³⁹ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 708.

troops were informed about this agreement and even an attack was cut off in the eastern sector.¹⁴⁰

From the 18th till January 24th, 1916 the negotiation about the Montenegrin surrender continued. On January 18th, 1916 the Austro-Hungarian troops started to disarm the Montenegrins. The western sector went well, but on the eastern sector the Montenegrins were not aware of the surrender.¹⁴¹ The negotiation was extremely long and the Austro-Hungarian leadership had the impression that the Montenegrins would reorganize themselves and continue fighting. It was not the case, but the issues discussed showed these negotiations were rather a delay tactic, than actual matters. On January 20th the Montenegrin delegation objected to some part of the terms because they considered them to be humiliating. They did not accept the soldiers to be POWs and they wanted to designate the places where the disarmament will be conducted. On January 22nd the Montenegrin delegation requested that their weapons should store in Montenegro to preserve their dignity. On January 24th the negotiations continued and a paragraph was taken out in order to save the Montenegrin delegation to be considered as traitors by their own people. This day the Austro-Hungarians were informed about King Nikola left the country to Italy. That required a new paragraph to clarify the authority of the government.

During this negotiation the Austro-Hungarian forces slowly advanced. The whole situation was unclear, lot of individuals surrendered, but few small enemy units executed raids on them. On January 18th, 1916 a small Task Force was designated from the 47th

¹⁴⁰ Nyári Iván, *A Montenegrói fegyverszüneti tárgyalások hatása a hadműveletekre*, 10.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

Division to move from Cetinje to Skutari on the east side of the Lake Skutari to occupy the city and disrupt the Serbian evacuation. During their movement to seize Virpazar, an intermediate location, they found by surprise Brigade Schiess disarming the Montenegrins. The Task Force continued its advance and needed four more days on the east side of the Lake to reach Skutari.¹⁴² Brigade Schiess continued disarming the Montenegrins, but they would reach Skutari on the west side of the lake by that time if they would not stop by an order. On January 22nd, 1916 the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army issued an order. The area of operation extended to the south till the Matti River and new direction was given to the subordinates. The XIX Corps advances with four brigades on the west side and with one brigade on the east side of Lake Skutari. The VIII Corps occupies Podgorica and joins to the advance to Skutari with two brigades. The 57th Division and 9th Mountain Brigade must have prepared to enter to Albania from Kosovo and south Montenegro. The rest of the troops disarmed the Montenegrins and secured the rear.¹⁴³

On January 25th, 1916 the document about the Montenegrin surrender was finally signed. The Montenegrin Army was disarmed by the next day and the Montenegrin operation ended. The negotiations consumed more days than the actual fighting and successfully slowed down the Austro-Hungarian advance. The Serbian forces in the meantime started their evacuation through San Giovanni di Medua and part of their force marched south towards Durazzo. The hope to capture the Serbian forces seemed more

¹⁴² Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 710.

¹⁴³ Nyári Iván, *A Montenegrói fegyverszüneti tárgyalások hatása a hadműveletekre*, 11.

difficult, but due to the false intelligence information still considered as a main objective and possible mission.

Summary of the Operation

The performance of the Austro-Hungarian forces was generally good, especially considering the results of the campaigns of 1914. This success brought back some of the lost dignity and morale.

However the operation was not without problems. The forces were on plan in the western sector, but in the east the troops lacked the fire power to break through. The operation succeeded, because the main effort was able to break through and the supporting efforts fixed the enemy.

The Movement and Maneuver forces performed average in the eastern sector and extremely well in the western sector. The eastern sector's troops executed hasty attacks against deliberate defense and that did not pay off. The battle of Majkovac showed the strength and agility of the Montenegrin defense and the lack of intelligence of the attackers. Neither the enemy nor the terrain and weather conditions favored to the hasty attack but the attacking troops also lacked the needed force ratio as well. The attacking commander had 25 first line and 41 third line infantry battalions. Even the first line infantry units were not able to make a difference and the battle of Majkovac. This battle showed the limits of third line units, they did not stand the heavy fire and proved their capable of defend, but only limited offensive task could execute by them. The lost of this battle was not a surprise and effectively stopped the eastern sector advance for days. The

western sector units had 20 first line and 42 third line battalions.¹⁴⁴ They had longer preparation time so they concentrated the first line units to the critical locations and that worked well. The third line units performed extremely well in some areas, especially on the right flank of the battle of Mount Lovcen. There were some good examples of combined arms warfare as well when the Montenegrin machine gun positions were taken out by infantry directed artillery fire. The advance to the rear was miserable due to the harsh road and weather conditions, but the units kept their combat readiness.

The Fires was that war fighting function which really made a difference. The use of naval gunfire was extremely useful and well planned, and coordinated. The flanking fire from the sea helped the right flank infantry to destroy the enemy's strong points and artillery and preserve combat power. The heavy artillery was able to provide effective counter-battery fire and the massive fortification did not protect the defenders. The western sector artillery generally outgunned the Montenegrins and the infantry's job became much easier. The western sector lacked this kind of luxury. They had only the organic fire support assets and lacked stockpiles of ammunition as well. They were able to cause heavy losses to the enemy this did not lead to success.

The Intelligence functioned poorly in general. Three air companies provided the reconnaissance information—which worked well in the western sector, but the estimation of the Serbian evacuation and the reports of the agents about the Albanian situation proved poor and false. The biggest mistake was the expectation that the Serbians would be evacuated to Italy. This misled the navy and it focused its intelligence efforts on covering the Italian naval routes.

¹⁴⁴ von Horstenau et al., 4:1-4.

The Sustainment performed well during this operation. The poor infrastructure did not offer too many options, but during the planning and preparation phase the troops received the needed supplies. The Montenegrin terrain and circumstances made the logistic officers life extremely difficult, while the country itself was out of supply and the local acquisition was almost impossible. The eastern sector locked the rail lines, so a field rail line was set up to help this issue, but obviously the most needed artillery ammunition was not able to transport enough. As the Montenegrin capital was seized, the road improvement started from Cattaro to Cetinje to provide viable lines of communication.¹⁴⁵ That road helped, but still the mountain equipped logistic units were the most effectively used in most cases.

The Protection had incredible amount of work done during this operation. The reduced number of engineer units made necessary to involve infantry units in the work as well. All artillery positions and command posts were prepared and fortified during the night hours from December 1915 till the end of this operation.¹⁴⁶ All preparation must have been covered from the overlooking Montenegrin observer posts. The preparations clearly were recognized by the Montenegrins, but tactically they were not able to identify the newly created positions. The Protection also prevented the epidemic during the advance to the rear, effectively controlling the local water sources and later decontaminating them.

¹⁴⁵ Jacobi Ágost, *A Magyar műszaki parancsnokságok, csapatok és alakulatok a világháborúban* [The Hungarian engineer commands, branches and units in the World War] (Budapest: Közlekedési nyomda KFT, 1938), 491.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 489.

The Mission Command performed well in the first week but later turned to poor. In the first week the army headquarters was able to follow the events and issue effective orders. During the pursuit and the advance to Skutari they lacked the information about the friendly unit's location. The radios had difficulties with the transmission among the mountains and the messenger system was not able to provide up to date information. The leading units received orders to stop and disarm the Montenegrins and the units in unfavorable situation received the orders to pursue the enemy.¹⁴⁷ These decisions delayed the further advance for days in the most promising situation. The effective mission command would gain better results. As a fact, the mission command acted poorly during the transition between the Montenegrin and the Albanian operation. However, compared to other Austro-Hungarian operations, this performance was still above the average and effective.

The Austro-Hungarian offensive resulted in a break through in west-Montenegro and by January 13th, 1916 the attackers occupied the small kingdom's capital. On January 14th, 1916 the King of Montenegro offered the surrender and the negotiations started. In a week the Montenegrins were defeated although units on the eastern part of the country still held their lines. The Montenegrins were tough partners during the negotiations. Each day they had a new issue to discuss and because the Austro-Hungarian ministries had to sign the paper, these documents had to be sent each day to Vienna. The Montenegrins finally signed the documents on January 25th, 1916, when the Serbian forces successfully left northern Albania. Montenegro gained more time with the negotiations than with actual fight. Although the Austro-Hungarian forces continued their

¹⁴⁷ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 709.

advance towards Albania, due to the instable situation this advance was slow and the disarming of the Montenegrin forces required every troop's involvement. This delay meant the Austro-Hungarian forces lost the possibility to capture the Serbian forces in Albania. The last Serbian unit left Skutari on January 21st, 1916 and the Austro-Hungarian units arrived there two days later. The Serbian forces, which were not transported by sea slowly moved to Valona but always few days ahead of the Austro-Hungarians. The Montenegrin negotiation successfully prevented the Austro-Hungarian forces to capture the retreating Serbians.

CHAPTER 5

ALBANIAN OPERATION

The Albanian operation was a follow-on operation of the Montenegrin operation. After the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army executed the Montenegrin operation it proceeded on to the Albanian operation on January 25th, 1916.¹⁴⁸ The AOK assessed the situation. The defeat of the Montenegrins was a big success and the Austro-Hungarian prestige grew a bit. The remaining tasks in the Balkans seemed executable with fewer forces, so the 57th and the 59th divisions were deployed to the Italian front. In Montenegro the situation was still not stable enough and most units of the VIII Corps remained there to conduct rear area security, but provided additional units for the XIX Corps. Disarming of the Montenegrins went without any major incident, although it was slow and required a lot of units to supervise. According to the Austro-Hungarian intelligence estimates the Serbian forces were still in Albania marching slowly south. The XIX Corps received the difficult task to seize Albania and capture the remaining Serbian forces there only with only two divisions strength. The AOK was convinced the submarines will report and possibly prevent the evacuation of the Serbians and the well organized Austro-Hungarian troops will easily pursue and destroy the Serbian Army's remnants. Chapter 5 will answer the following research questions:

“How did the Austro-Hungarian offense slow down and finally stop?”

“Why the Italian forces did not counter-attack from their position?”

¹⁴⁸ Gleichen, 7.

Planning Phase

The Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army initiated planning after seizing Mount Lovcen on January 11th, 1916. The main tasks of the 3rd Army's advancing troops were to pursue the Serbian forces and disrupt their evacuation. The situation was uncertain and air reconnaissance was able to gain information only on the northernmost Albanian territories and ports. The 3rd Army's assessment based on the reconnaissance was close to the reality. According to reports Serbian troops remained in Albania, one army in Durazzo, two armies on the move to Valona and the rest of the armies in Valona. This assessment was almost certain, as the Serbian evacuation just recently started on January 15th, 1916 and the Armies were that areas. The other enemy forces were the Italians. Two main Italian group was designated, a brigade size element in Durazzo and a division size in Valona. These estimations were quite accurate, in Durazzo the Savona Brigade was located with reinforcements and that time the 38th Division was deployed there. The rest of the XVI Italian Corps arrived in mid February. They did not expect too heavy fights with the Italians based on their performance in the Isonzo battles and known that these units newly created formations. The Albanians had a small element, which being pro-Serbian supposedly will fight against the Austro-Hungarian forces. The estimation counted a battalion of them. The estimation of the terrain and weather had some problems. The obstacles of the terrain was known so the engineers prepared to lay bridges on the rivers and creeks. The estimation on the snow on the mountains the effect of the melting was unknown and the laid bridges were destroyed by the strong streamline. Analyzing the time, the Austro-Hungarians hoped to cut off and destroy the Serbians before they could escape. The 3rd Army plan incorporated an advance along the

coastline, the main effort; with other forces in Kosovo fixing, disrupting and pursuing the Serbians. The plan was simple, but the terrain and weather conditions were extremely difficult. The 3rd Army issued its order on January 16th, 1916 but the Montenegrin situation delayed its execution on time.¹⁴⁹ The advancing troops must disarm the Montenegrins and secure the rear area before entering to Albania.

The participating troops in the Northern Albanian operation were under the command of the XIX Corps. Underneath the XIX Corps were the 14th Brigade, the 20th Landsturm Brigade, the Fortress Infantry Brigade, the Brigade Schiess and the Brigade Streith. Although the VIII Corps had started the preparation to leave this theatre some of its units also participated in this operation. The 59th and 57th Division, the 9th Mountain Brigade and the 205th Landsturm Brigade supported the operation under the direct command of the 3rd Army.¹⁵⁰ The XIX Corps units were ordered to advance south while the direct commanded units secured the left flank and the rear. These units were sufficient for a small scale pursue-type operation, but not for a major engagement. The terrain and weather conditions although did not allowed much more forces to deploy. These amounts of troops had serious supply problems as well.¹⁵¹

The troops located in Montenegro executed the disarming the Montenegrin forces and securing the area. This task required more time, so does the relocation of the forces and preparation for further advance. This relocation took more time than it should, while the Austro-Hungarian 3rd Army lacked the situational awareness. Their orders initiated

¹⁴⁹ vitéz Czékus Zoltán, 267.

¹⁵⁰ von Horstenau et al., 4:62.

¹⁵¹ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 716.

troop movements but the units in the most favorable positions were ordered to wait and others from the rear ordered to attack. Understandably these orders created confusion among the lead elements.¹⁵²

Complicating the campaign in Albania, the Austro-Hungarian General Staff started the preparation for its new offensive on the Italian Front and they wanted to use the forces currently deployed to the Balkans for this operation. The situation in Montenegro stabilized by the end of January and the AOK initiated the VIII Corps unit's piecemeal redeployment to other fronts. The 21st Landsturm Mountain Brigade was the first unit which left the Balkan theatre to the Eastern Front on January 22nd, 1916.¹⁵³ As the situation allowed more units were withdrawn from the Balkans and the 3rd Army had to continue its mission regardless of the less available troops.

The available troops looked enough for occupying Northern Albania, but the Italian forces presented bigger threat. The terrain and weather conditions although did not allowed much more units deployment there. The 3rd Army must have solved its task with the remaining forces. The terrain allowed the troops from Kosovo to move through the Albanian Alps and this maneuver could capture some part of the Serbians. The operation although became much more terrain focused than enemy focused so lost its original aim.

Preparation Phase

After the fall of Cetinje on January 13th, 1916, preparations for further offensive actions had started. Unlike the Montenegrin operation, the preparation of the Albanian

¹⁵² Ibid., Part 2, 708.

¹⁵³ von Horstenau et al., 4:61.

operation lacked the stabile background. The whole army was on its move, occupied with disarming the Montenegrins and securing the gained territories. Really the units executed this operation after a hasty preparation, which was natural in case of pursuit. The units ordered to execute the operation in Albania received priorities in supplies, but due to the transportation difficulties that was not so much. The road from Cattaro to Cetinje was widened and reinforced to accommodate automobiles and other heavy equipment. This work, although completed in a week, required continues maintenance and workers units to be positioned along the road to maintain trafficability. This road became extremely busy and required the establishment of a supplementary line of communication. A cable cart system was initiated in late January, but it was not finished in April.¹⁵⁴ The civilian situation required some attention as well, while the Montenegrin stocks of food were almost empty and much effort required transporting enough supply. The locals were supported with grains and salt, but they were short on water as well. Many cisterns were contaminated by retreating troops and for days only one liter of water per person was the portion for soldiers and even less for locals.¹⁵⁵ These difficulties made the planners cautious and they put emphasis on the logistics and movement support. They knew this advance would be slow, but due to their better equipment status still hoped for the success of the pursuit.

The troops in Kosovo also initiated preparations for future operations. Their orders were to isolate the Serbians from the East and pursue them on order. In addition to

¹⁵⁴ Jacobi Ágost, *A Magyar műszaki parancsnokságok, csapatok és alakulatok a világháborúban* [The Hungarian engineer commands, branches and units in the World War] (Budapest: Közlekedési nyomda KFT, 1938), 490.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

that, six Albanian battalions were organized under Albanian speaking Austro-Hungarian officers and two battalions under Albanian warlords. These Albanian forces had more than 6000 man, but their combat effectiveness was low.¹⁵⁶ The first order came on February 5th, 1916 to start the preparation for advancing to Durazzo. All units, including combat arms and combat service support units were ordered to help the engineers to reinforce and strengthen roads through the Albanian Alps.

All Austro-Hungarian units took efforts to carefully plan their logistics, especially the food supply. The environment in Montenegro was not friendly and did not offer too much local supply source, but it was far worse in Albania. The whole Northern area had been looted by the Serbian forces and the local supply was almost impossible.¹⁵⁷ These preparations delayed the advance even more, giving additional days for the retreating Serbians.

The capturing of the Serbian forces still looked possible. However the Austro-Hungarian General Staff expected the Serbians to withdraw to Italy and designated most of the intelligence and reconnaissance effort towards that direction. The leading Austro-Hungarian elements met with smaller Serbian units and this information just reinforced that misbelieve the Serbian evacuation had not yet started.

Occupation of Northern Albania

The advancing units of the XIX Corps had reached Skutari on January 23rd, 1916. This city was the northern centre of Serbian evacuation, due to its great connection to the

¹⁵⁶ Németh József, 61.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

sea. The Austro-Hungarian units captured the city without any resistance. They found a sad landscape. Unburied human and horse bodies lied on the streets, bone skinny, starving soldiers were in the buildings and their storehouses were empty. A few hundred Serbian soldiers were captured and three hundred Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war were released.¹⁵⁸ All of them were in extremely poor physical conditions due to the harsh marching through the Albanian mountains and starvation. The locals received the Austro-Hungarian troops warmly, and hoped that the K.u.K. would end their suffering. The unburied bodies could cause serious epidemic situation, so many units were involve to bury them. This task was accomplished by February 2nd, due to the rocky terrain. The water situation was quite similar to the Montenegrin situation, and all water sources were under military supervision. During this period the Montenegrin forces and civilians were disarmed and only the Albanians kept their weapons.¹⁵⁹ That officially ended the Montenegrin operations and a military government period started under General Stefan Sarkotic. This event provided more secure ground LOC's and some reinforcement in case of need.

According to the Austro-Hungarian air reconnaissance executed on January 22nd, 1916, the Serbian 1st Army was in Durazzo, while the 2nd and 3rd Armies already embarked.¹⁶⁰ The retreating Serbian forces left Skutari and San Giovanni di Medua on January 21st, and retreated south from Alessio on January 24th.¹⁶¹ The Austro-Hungarian

¹⁵⁸ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 710.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 711.

¹⁶⁰ von Horstenau et al., 4:65.

¹⁶¹ vitéz Czékus Zoltán, 268.

units met only with the sick, wounded and starving Serbian remnants of them. This time Durazzo was the northernmost evacuation port and the Italian forces held it firmly with Serbian and Albanian augmentation. These Albanians were under the command of Essad Pahsa and he remained loyal to the Serbians even after their leave. Due to the unfavorable situation his forces were not bigger than a battalion that time. The Serbian South Group arrived to Valona on January 9th, 1916 and started the evacuation on January 28th.

The weather became warmer at end of January, which caused the melting of the snow in the mountains. The precipitation also changed to rain and the low ground along the coastline became almost impassable. Only few small roads provided avenues of approach. The lead elements captured Alessio on January 28th, 1916, with almost the same conditions as Skutari. The majority of the Group Sorsich arrived to Alessio on February 3rd, 1916. In spite of the fact both San Giovanni di Medua and Alessio had a port; the naval supply was delayed due to sea mines laid by both sides. The mines caused the sinking of the transport ship *Andrássy* on March 31st, 1916. The slow process of counter-mine operations meant that the Austro-Hungarians still relied on the ground lines of communication.¹⁶² Alessio became a small station where the units spent few days to reorganize and resupply themselves.

On February 5th, 1916 a small reorganization was executed inside the Austro-Hungarian Balkan forces. It was part of a major reorganization, but during this operation it revealed only with renaming the different units. Group Schorsich became the 63rd Division Brigade, Schiess became 210th Landsturm Brigade, Brigade Streith as 211th Landsturm brigade, Brigade Löbl (former Haustein) as 212th brigade. The Fortress

¹⁶² Csonkárty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 108.

Infantry brigade became 22nd Landsturm Mountain Brigade, Brigade Schwarz became 23rd Landsturm Mountain Brigade and Group Zhuber became 24th Landsturm Mountain Brigade.¹⁶³

At the same time the AOK ordered the units of the VIII Corps to leave the Balkans for the Italian front; except for the 2nd K.u.K. Mountain Brigade, which was stationed around Prizren.¹⁶⁴ The 3rd Army had the XIX Corps, the 2nd K.u.K. Mountain Brigade and the Bosnian garrison units to continue the operation. The newly created Albanian units were led from Kosovo, by the 2nd K.u.K. Mountain Brigade, but from that location it was difficult to have a good common operating picture and effectively lead them. This amount of troops was sufficient for the occupation of Albania, but not executing major engagements. A battle with the Serbians would be highly problematic, but due to the historical outcome it never happened. The other possible engagement was the Italian forces in Durazzo, which looked a mission possible in case of a tight force concentration. The XIX Corps was not in a good situation regarding to the friendly forces situation and the task needed to be executed.

The Austro-Hungarian advance towards south went even slower. The rivers flooded and the hastily set up bridges collapsed. The leading elements had extremely bad supply situation. In the leading cavalry units the usual daily food ration was cut to one-third.¹⁶⁵ By February 3rd, 1916 the Austro-Hungarian forces finally reached the Serbian rear guard. The Serbians used their prepared defense lines south of Ismi and successfully

¹⁶³ von Horstenau et al., 4:66.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶⁵ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 714.

pushed back the 211th Landsturm brigade to Mamuras and the 210th Landsturm brigade to Alessio by February 5th, 1916.¹⁶⁶ The remaining forces of the XIX corps (47th division) were in an assembly area near Skutari. The 2nd Mountain Brigade, which was stationed at Prizren deployed a task force under Lieutenant-Colonel Zloch (1 and half battalion, half battery) to the south side of Ismi River and the rest of the brigade still executed the preparations.

The advancing 63rd Division reached Tirana by February 9th, 1916, which allowed the Austro-Hungarian forces to control central Albania.¹⁶⁷ The 211th Brigade reached the Italian-Serbian defense outer perimeters around Durazzo by February 13th, 1916. The Albanian units under Austro-Hungarian lead also played a major role in the offense. They did not require too much supply, as the locals fed them. Two battalions were in Tirana, two other execute flank security on the left flank towards the Albanian Alps, one executed reconnaissance south of Tirana and one remained near Kruja to provide security to the advancing 2nd K.u.K Mountain Brigade through the Albanian Alps. These Albanian battalions were ordered under the XIX Corps commander's direct lead from February 13th, 1916.¹⁶⁸ The advancing units seized Kavalla and cut off Durazzo's land connections on February 17th, 1916; and started their preparations to seize the port on February 18th, 1916.

¹⁶⁶ von Horstenau et al., 4:66.

¹⁶⁷ Zigány Árpád, Tolnai, 8:13.

¹⁶⁸ Németh József, 62.

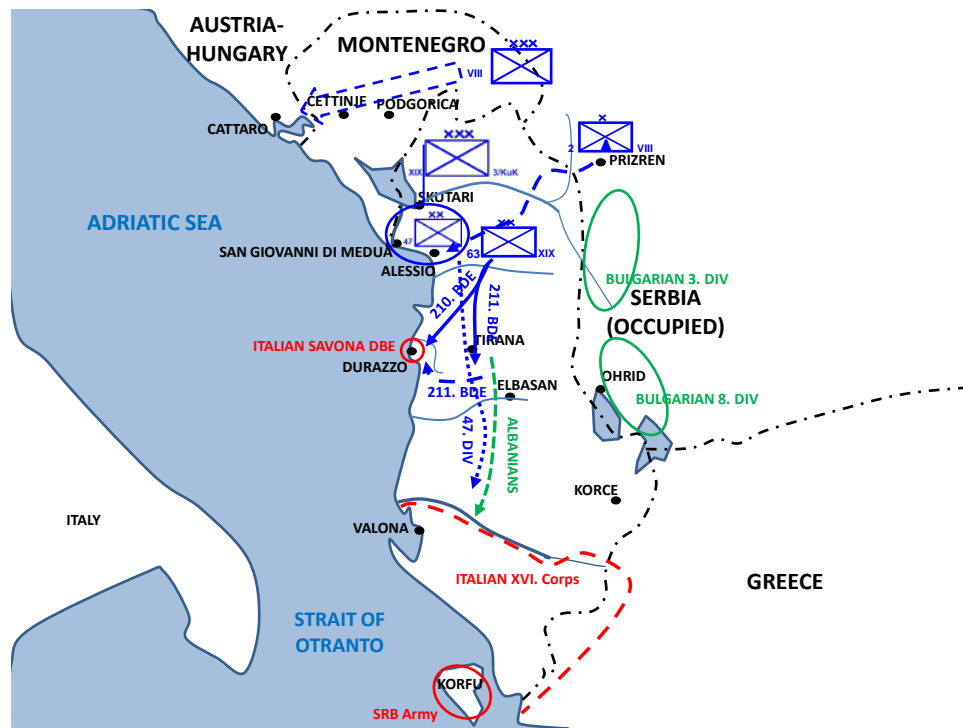


Figure 7. Maneuvers in Albania

Source: By Author, based on Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, and Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, vol 4, Beilage 3 [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918 vol 4, Annex 3] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 1.

The 2nd K.u.K. Mountain Brigade started its march through the Albanian Alps on February 14th, 1916. This march was extremely difficult and the Austro-Hungarian troops experienced the same difficulties that the retreating Serbians had few months ago. In spite of the fact the Brigade put a lot of effort into its preparations, those advantages were lost due to the melting snow. The prepared roads became a good riverbed full of water and mud, made this march miserable. The small mountain passages were too tight for even the mules and many of them fell to their deaths. The trafficability of the roads did not allow the supply units to move backwards to resupply, so a unique system was

used. With the Albanian battalion's provided security, the trains marched to set up forward supply points. A small detachment remained in the supply point, but the majority of the unit marched towards the Alessio, the XIX Corps supply depot, where they receive some supply and moving backwards set up another supply points.¹⁶⁹ The 2nd Mountain Brigade executed three main river-crossings and most of the overnights were on the mountain area without any cover from the continuous rain. The rain and the melting snow raised the level of the rivers and some of the prepared bridges were destroyed. Task Force Zloch had arrived to Durrazzo by February 20th, 1916, so they participated on the battle. The rest of the Brigade arrived to Alessio area on the 24th of February. The 8000 man and 4000 horse strong brigade lost three dead and almost 400 injured during this march. The whole 100 kilometer advance was planned to be executed in six days, but in reality it took 10 days even for a mountain unit.¹⁷⁰ After arriving to their assembly area the Brigade required refit and a small reorganization, but by the time they were ready to deploy the battle of Durazzo was decided. This movement was planned as a force concentration against Durazzo, but General Sorsich, the commander on scene took advantage on the situation and the battle was won without this reinforcement. The 2nd K.u.K. Mountain Brigade after an extremely difficult march without major engagement. The unit was ordered to move from Alessio to Cattaro and redeployed to the Italian front.

By February 20th, 1916, the Austro-Hungarian forces controlled Montenegro, North Albania and most of the central part of Albania. The main obstacle for their further

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 80.

advance was Durazzo and they prepared to seize it. There were still some Serbian units in the town, but most of the already evacuated.

Seizing Durazzo

The Austro-Hungarian forces had the 63rd Division under the lead of General Béla Sorsich for this engagement. The 14th K.u.K. Mountain Brigade was under the 47th Division stationed in Skutari, so they would reinforce the 63rd Division in case of. This Mountain Brigade was ordered to secure the area around Skutari and Alessio. The 20th Landturm Mountain Brigade was also under the 47th Division, but from Alessio they were ordered to reinforce the 63rd Division.¹⁷¹ The Austro-Hungarian forces lined up 17 battalions and eight batteries for this battle. That meant 17 Austro-Hungarian battalion faced 12 Italian, which was not a significant advantage. The plan counted the 2nd Mountain Brigade and the 14th Mountain Brigade as well, but they were planned to arrive later and the force ration would be better.

The Italian forces belonged to the Savona Brigade augmented with a battalion of Albanian militia forces, all together counted 12 battalions and six batteries.¹⁷² The first line of defense was about six kilometers from the city, but there was no real defendable strongpoint or obstacle, only the trenches. The Italian forces arrived to Durazzo in November 1915, so they had quite a bit of time to be prepared for defense. They built up two main defense lines and forward positions for security. The terrain was a lowland, but with many rivers which provided additional 30 meter wide defensible obstacle to the

¹⁷¹ von Horstenau et al., 4:71.

¹⁷² Ibid., 68.

Italians. The lowland locally became extremely muddy due to the wet weather and the high water level.

The first engagement occurred on February 11th, 1916 between the Austro-Hungarian and Italian units. The Italian advance guard was able to defend its positions, but three days later the 210th Brigade seized the Italian positions and by February 17th, 1916 the city of Durazzo was encircled from the land. From February 19th, 1916 the Austro-Hungarians started the preparations for the assault. The preparations continued till February 22nd, 1916, because of the supply problems. The infantry lacked the food and the artillery the ammunitions due to the raising rivers again destroyed its bridge.¹⁷³

General Sorsich decided to take the advantage of the Italian's cautious defense and ordered the attack. On February 23rd, 1916, the battle began and the Austro-Hungarian forces engaged the Italian defenders. At 0600, the artillery preparation started and at 0730, the Infantry assault was launched.¹⁷⁴ The Italian forces had a long and loosely occupied defense line, but according to the air reconnaissance 13 ships supported the defense by naval gunfire. The Austro-Hungarian right flank initiated a river crossing. The 3rd Frontier-Jager Company has some volunteers who crossed the river and by 1800, they had a small bridgehead on the west side of the river. The Italians did not counter-attack and on the 24th, at 0400 the main forces of the 210 Brigade crossed the Arzen River through the reinforced crossing site and captured the Italian first defense lines. The retreating defenders left their washed clothes in the trenches so it looked they run away. After advancing a kilometer an intermediate defense line stopped the advance and it

¹⁷³ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 717.

¹⁷⁴ von Horstenau et al., 4:72.

halted at 1200. At this point the Italian Commander, General Ferrero ordered the evacuation due to the hopeless situation. The situation did not changed till the next morning and the attackers had a harsh night on the muddy terrain.¹⁷⁵

The advance on the south had other difficulties. A village ruled the terrain and by 0900, on February 25th, 1916 Bazar Sjak controlled by the Austro-Hungarian 20th Mountain Brigade. The second line of defense was about two kilometers from Durazzo and by the evening of February 25th, 1916 the attackers reached that line.¹⁷⁶ From this point the Austro-Hungarian artillery was able to efficiently bomb the embarking troops and ships. The counter battery fire was effective and some Italian battery was destroyed.¹⁷⁷ The Italian destroyers entered into the fight at 0530 and suppressed the Austro-Hungarian batteries till 1000. Due to the good cover and the bad Italian fire observation the Austro-Hungarian artillery did not suffered casualties, but was not able to prevent the evacuation as well.

The next day the fight was inside the city and the Italian forces quite successfully prevented the Austro-Hungarian forces from capturing larger Italian formations. The evacuation went quite well and at 1700, the Italians started to destroy the remaining supplies and stockpiles.¹⁷⁸ By nightfall, the city was under the control of Austria-

¹⁷⁵ Fráter Jenő ny. altábornagy, Part 2, 719.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 720.

¹⁷⁷ vitéz tiszabeői Hellebronth Antal, A Magyar Tüzér, [The Hungarian Artilleryman] (Budapest: Reé László könyvkiadó és könyvterjesztő vállalat, 1938), 239.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian Navy would prevent or at least disturb the evacuation, but their leadership assessed as too risky to intervene.

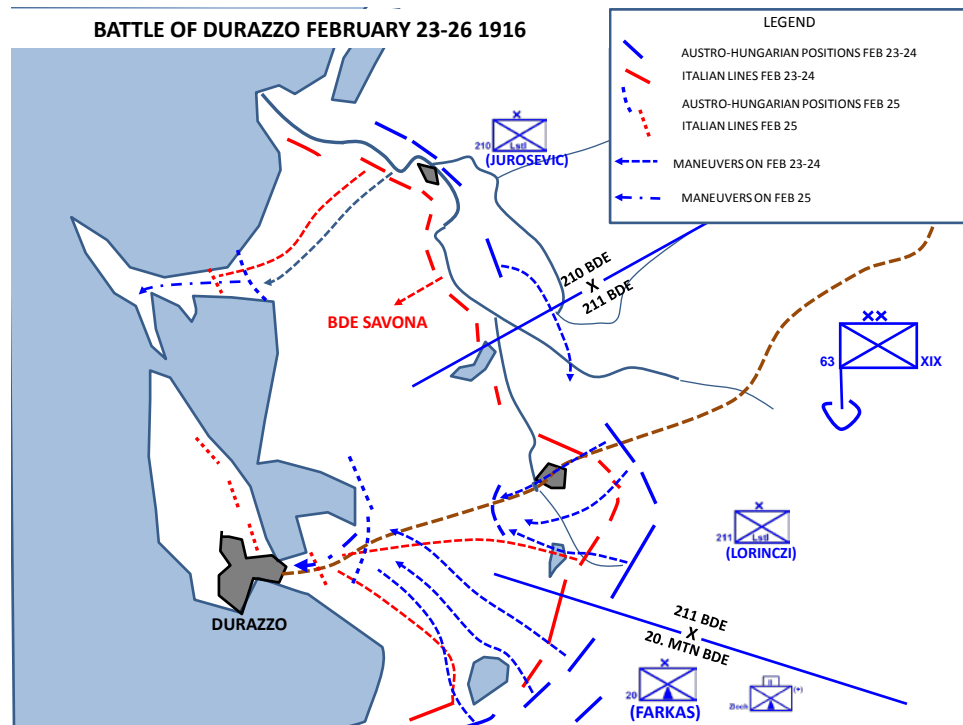


Figure 8. Battle of Durazzo

Source: By Author, based on: Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehn, Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol IV. Beilage 3 [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918 Vol IV. Annex 3] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 1.

This victory was the peak of the Albanian operation. One reinforced division seized a city, which was defended by a large brigade. There was only 1.5:1 force ratio and more than half of the Austro-Hungarian troops were third line infantry. The casualty rate was low, while the attackers lost four officers and 69 enlisted (10 of the Albanian) dead, 300 wounded and 50 missing in action. The defenders lost 17 officers and 742

enlisted as prisoners of war. The 63rd Division confiscated 34 artillery pieces, one machine gun, 14,000 rifles and enough food supply for three days.¹⁷⁹ During the whole campaign it was the only occasion when actually the enemy's food was available for the attackers. The Italian forces did not expose too much effort on the defense. Some Italian source justified this battle as a planned evacuation, but the captured materials and POW's prove the actual intent was to hold the port. The Italian reconnaissance had the same problem as all other contemporary, they over estimated the enemy's power. The aggressiveness of General Sorsich paid off.

The whole central portion of Albania was under the control of Austria-Hungary and the operational preconditions for further advancement were created, with the exception of the logistic situation, the units hardly had few days of supply. The advance delayed until more stabile land and sea lines of communications were established.

Advance to the Vojusa River

On February 24th, 1916, the Austro-Hungarian General Staff ordered the 3rd Army to leave the Balkans. From February 26th, 1916, the XIX Corps Commander was the Supreme Commander of all Austro-Hungarian troops in the Balkans. The 63rd Division received the task of rear area security from Skutari to Alessio, while the 47th Division received the task to advance to the south. Majority of the XIX Corps units were ordered to regroup around Tirana, except a weak brigade, which secured Durazzo.

¹⁷⁹ Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol IV [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 75.

The fastest supply would arrive by sea, so a demining operation started in the port of Durazzo. The operation started in the end of February and by March 16th, 40 mines were deactivated and a canal was open to the traffic. This demining operation was disrupted by Entente naval actions few times, but no damage was caused to the Austro-Hungarian ships. The demining operation was supported by the naval aviation, which detect the mines and successfully led the minesweepers.¹⁸⁰

The land lines of communication required much more time and resources. Interestingly the cable cart system was chosen as fastest solution. Due to the hastily laid structure this instruments needed continuous repair. A better solution was to establish a field railroad from Durazzo to the Vojusa valley, which had only limited capability, but it was the only reliable contact to the troops.¹⁸¹

The supply problems stopped the Austro-Hungarian troops in Central Albania along the Skumbi River. A bridge, materials and more food supply were required, but due to the extended lines of communications the advance stopped for a month. The only solution for a quick result was to send forward the Albanian troops. These troops were able to survive in extremely harsh conditions and their supply system built on the local supply. Due to them being Albanians the locals supplied them willingly. The Captain Ghilardy led battalion received the task to advance to the Vojusa River.

The Italian forces in the meantime grew to a reinforced corps. The Italian forces were under the XVI Corps and the following units were its subordinates, the 38th, the

¹⁸⁰ Csonkaréty Károly, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia haditengerészete*, 108.

¹⁸¹ Jacobi Ágost, *A Magyar műszaki parancsnokságok, csapatok és alakulatok a világháborúban*, [The Hungarian engineer commands, branches and units in the World War] (Budapest: Közlekedési nyomda KFT, 1938), 492.

43rd, and the 44th Infantry Divisions; the 10th Bersaglieri Regiment and three militia regiments.¹⁸² These forces counted almost 100,000 soldiers, but their main task was to prevent the Greek forces from seizing south Albania. So these forces had a defensive task for both north and south; and they were about to extend their lines towards the Salonika Front. The defense lines extended 130 kilometers along the Vojusa River and some forward positions secured the northern side of the river. This defense line secured Valona and that was the Italian main objective. Due to the extended lines towards east and the Italian front enormous supply requirements, these units also lacked the supply and suffered the lack of infrastructure.

Captain Ghilardi led his Albanian Battalion to the south and occupied Berat by March 8th and Fjeri by March 9th. They reached the Vojusa Valley and after they defeated the Italian advance guard finally occupied the northern part of the River by March 15th, 1916.¹⁸³ The XIX Corps realized the Italian strength and due to the Albanian troops' combat effectiveness the 47th Division was sent forward to occupy the Vojusa frontline. The Albanian troops were used as a flank security towards Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa where the Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian lines reached each other.

The Austro-Hungarian lines of communication were over extended. The supply from Durazzo to the frontline reached as an average in 14 days. During rainy seasons this time extended more. Even the field railroads were not able to provide enough supply for

¹⁸² Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, Vol IV [Austro-Hungarians last war, 1914-1918] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 79.

¹⁸³ *vitéz Czékus Zoltán*, 268.

an offensive. The Austro-Hungarian forces planned an offensive in Albania in 1918 simultaneously with their Piave Offensive, which required six months preparation time. That offensive became a counter-offensive while the Italians attacked first, but due to the preparation the frontline was reestablished again by the end of August 1918.¹⁸⁴

Summary

The Austro-Hungarian operation reached its primary objective, securing the right flank of the Central Powers by seizing most of Albania. The secondary objective to capture the Serbian forces in Albania did not succeed just like the opening of the Otranto Strait.

The performance of the land units were good, in some cases excellent, but the supply situation combined with the poor infrastructure prevented the fast advance which could be the precondition of successful pursue. The long distance between the secured port of Durazzo and the frontline along the Vojusa River created such a massive obstacle to the Austro-Hungarian logisticians that they were not able to overcome even years after the operation. The Austro-Hungarian forces simply culminated and they were not able to execute offensive task so far from the homeland.

The Italian forces were occupied with the advancing to the east when the Austro-Hungarian led Albanian troops arrived to the Vojusa. After they consolidated the situation and they were ready to act, the Austro-Hungarian 47th Division arrived to the frontline and the Italians also lacked the supply to launch an offensive.

¹⁸⁴ vitéz tiszabeő Hellebronth Antal, *A Magyar Tüzér* [The Hungarian Artilleryman] (Budapest: Reé László könyvkiadó és könyvterjesztő vállalat, 1938), 241.

This operation was a success for the Central Powers, but not as decisive as it could be in case of a unified action. The Austro-Hungarian morale increased among the troops as well as in the hinterland. The situation in the Balkan was much safer to Austria-Hungary than before and the frontlines stiffened for years. Due to this over estimated success, the Austro-Hungarian General Staff felt, it is the time to launch a new unilateral offensive on the Italian Front.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Montenegrin-Albanian Operation had the potential to greatly influence the war in the Mediterranean Theatre. The execution of the offensive lost momentum, and although the Balkan frontline was secured; the Central Powers still fought in an isolated area and the Entente Powers were able to build up their Allied Army of the Orient. The Montenegrin-Albanian Campaign was the last of the series of Central Powers' successful offensives in 1915 and 1916, and the struggle continued in every front.

The Central Powers set up a unified Balkan front command under General August von Meckensen in mid-1916. The frontline started east of Salonika, followed the Greek-Serbian border and the Vojusa River in southern Albania. The left wing was secured by the Bulgarian and Turkish units, the centre by Bulgarians and Germans, while the right wing Austro-Hungarians and Albanians. This frontline successfully contained the Entente forces in the Balkans until September 1918.

On the sea the situation did not change too much. The Austro-Hungarian fleet continued its fleet-in-being strategy and did not leave the Adriatic with surface flotillas. Their submarine warfare, however, became more effective. The increasing number of submarine attacks on the Mediterranean Sea forced the Entente navies to set up the Otranto Barrier [naval blockade] to contain the Central Powers' submarines. This barrier had a huge impact on the Central Powers naval activity, but generally failed to stop the submarine threat in the area. This barrier started from the Italian city of Brindisi and ended in Valona Albania.

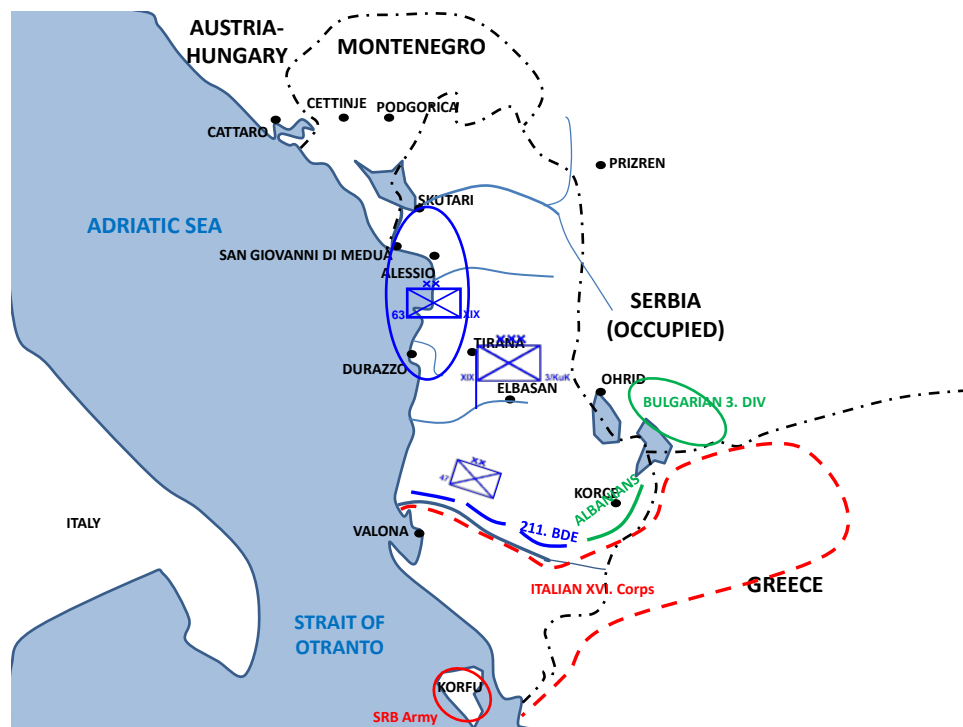


Figure 9. Situation in the Albanian front end of March 1916

Source: By Author, based on: Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Rudolf Kiszling, Maximilian Ehnle, and Edwin Sacken, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter krieg, 1914-1918*, vol 4, Beilage 3 [Austro-Hungarians Last War, 1914-1918 vol 4, Annex 3] (Wien: Österreichischen Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung und vom Kriegsarchiv, 1933), 1.

The Montenegrin-Albanian Campaign did have a major result, the surrender of Montenegro. This news was not a good sign to the Entente Powers and understandably received little press coverage. Among the Central Powers this victory improved the Austro-Hungarian prestige and created a favorable situation in the Balkans. The failure of capturing the Serbian forces had a reverse effect. The Entente Powers showed their solidarity and kept one ally in the war. The Central Powers chose not to mention the Serbian evacuation of Austro-Hungarian POW's. The Austro-Hungarian offensive was

stopped due to lack of the cooperation among the Central Powers, the long negotiation about the Montenegrin surrender, and the extended logistical supply lines.

The Central Powers had a major internal debate about the war goals in the fall of 1915. The German Chief of General Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn insisted on his method to search a decisive victory on the Western Front and bleed out the French. He focused every available force around Verdun. Conrad von Hötzendorf, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of General Staff, had a different method to achieve victory. He wanted to defeat the Entente Powers one by one. He insisted on to continue the Balkan campaign and after the complete Central Powers victory continue on the Italian front. Finally, he hoped that the Austro-Hungarian forces would be able to launch a second front against France through the Alps. These conflicting methods, when combined with the two Chief of General Staffs' personalities and dislikes towards each other, made the cooperation impossible among the two countries. It was an example of friction between the military objectives (ways) to support the political endstate. Most importantly, what means (available resources) weighted against acceptable risk would best support the endstate.

The Bulgarian forces could have helped in the campaign, but debates own territorial spoils with the Austro-Hungarians created tension. When Bulgaria joined to the Central Powers it was promised that Bulgaria would regain the territories it lost in the second Balkan War. The Bulgarian forces, however, advance further than their promised borderline and they intended to keep those territories it captured. The area was southern Kosovo and Austria-Hungary also wanted that province under her control. The two countries turned to Germany to decide this debate. Germany shared the province in two equal parts, which hurt the Austro-Hungarian interests. Preventing further territorial

debates Austria-Hungary decided to launch a unilateral campaign. They had enough forces to defeat Montenegro and after continue the offensive in Albania, but not enough to do these operations simultaneously. This decision was a key event. With fewer forces the task looked still doable, but the Serbian forces would gain enough time to escape and the Italians could reinforce their contingent in southern Albania and prevent the control of all Albanian territories. The Austro-Hungarians took this risk and launched the campaign. They lost so much time defeating the Montenegrins and securing the lines of communications in northern Albania that the Serbians were able to evacuate and the Italians to reinforce their defense in southern Albania. The importance of multinational cooperation was a key of success in the World War One, and it is still today.

The extended logistical supply lines prevent the Austro-Hungarian forces to mass combat power against the Italian defense lines in southern Albania. The Austro-Hungarians had knowledge about the west-Balkan's poor infrastructure and the difficulties it could cause. The decision was to launch a winter campaign, which had always a risk of the difficult weather condition, especially in mountainous terrain. The defeat of Montenegro opened the way to Albania from the north. The first obstacle was Montenegro itself, because this tiny country had small improved road network which was not connected to the Austro-Hungarian port of Cattaro. The first task was to connect the road network to Cattaro, but due to the rough terrain only a small hardly trafficable road was built, which needed continuous maintenance. A cable cart system was established from Cattaro to Cetinje to have supplementary lines of communication. This solution mad the supply situation satisfactory in the whole Montenegro and south till Skutari. Northern Albania had much poorer infrastructure and only the cable cart system could

solve the problem. The Austro-Hungarian engineers hastily set up the lines from town to town in the shortest possible way through marshes, rivers, hilltops and valleys. It was the only reliable transport system till mid 1917, when a field railway was implemented from Durazzo to the Vojusa River. In the meantime the conventional ground transportation had to be maintained as well, so the engineers were occupied improving roads and building bridges. The Mediterranean winter was extremely wet and the melting snow increased the level of the rivers, which usually washed away the hastily set up bridges. Each lost bridge meant one or two days delay on the supply system and the troops grew hungry. The local supply purchase was impossible because of the Serbian Army's looting and the local population hardly had anything to feed themselves. The capturing of Durazzo helped a situation a bit, while a big port was able to receive more supplies, but this shortened supply lines were still long. A ground movement took two weeks to reach the Vojusa River from Durazzo in good weather conditions. The supply arrived to Durazzo through the sea, where the Entente had superiority and often blocked these lines for days. A modern army is a helpless mass of man without proper supply and this dependence of supply just increased over the last century. The Austro-Hungarian forces started their offensive on January 5th, 1916 and seized Durazzo on February 27th, 1916. Almost two months of advance in extremely harsh condition with a faulty supply system the culmination was evident by mid March 1916. When the advancing troops arrived to the Italian defense lines they were rather happy to halt and rest, than execute an assault against the Italians. Even after the situation was stabilized in Albania, this frontline duty offered the most difficulties to the Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

The Austro-Hungarian offensive resulted in a break through in west-Montenegro and by January 13th, 1916 the attackers occupied the small kingdom's capital. On January 14th, 1916 King of Montenegro offered the surrender and the negotiations started. In a week the Montenegrins were defeated although units on the eastern part of the country still held their lines. The Montenegrins were tough partners during the negotiations. Each day they had a new issue to discuss and due to the Austro-Hungarian ministries must sign the paper, these documents must send each day to Vienna. The Montenegrins finally signed the documents on January 25th, 1916, when the Serbian forces successfully left northern Albania. Montenegro gained more time with the negotiations than with actual fight. Although the Austro-Hungarian forces continued their advance towards Albania, due to the instable situation this advance was slow and the disarming of the Montenegrin forces required every troop's involvement. This delay meant the Austro-Hungarian forces lost the possibility of capturing the Serbian forces in Albania. The last Serbian unit left Skutari on January 21st, 1916 and the Austro-Hungarian units arrived there two days later. The Serbian forces, which were not transported by sea slowly moved to Valona but were always few days ahead of the Austro-Hungarians. The Montenegrin negotiation successfully prevented the Austro-Hungarian forces from capturing the retreating Serbians.

The defeat and the surrender of the Montenegrins are the most valuable outcome of this campaign, as well as securing the southernmost Austro-Hungarian port, Cattaro. Seizing Albania's territories is a controversial result and many discussions are about this topic even today. In a geopolitical point of view the Albanian operation was necessary to shorten the Balkan front and the Albanian population was friendly towards the Austro-

Hungarians. On the other hand, this front did not contribute too much for the Central Powers and the malaria caused heavy casualties for no benefits. The capturing of the Serbian Army did not succeed in many reasons. The Austro-Hungarian Navy failed to prevent the sea evacuation and the land offensive was extremely slow. The securing of the Otranto Strait failed as well, while Valona remained in Italian hands.

As a result of this campaign, General Kövess became a national hero of Austria-Hungary and he was promoted to field marshal. His reputation was so high that he was appointed as the last Austro-Hungarian Chief of General Staff in 1918. The XIX Corps remained in Albania, but only with the 47th Division, the 211th Brigade, and the Albanian auxiliary forces. This force had a total fighting power of 22,000 men and 31 batteries by the end of 1916. The Austro-Hungarian General Staff was able to use the economy of force in the Balkan, due to the favorable terrain and the passivity of the Entente forces.

Recommendation

This campaign has some really important lessons for modern professionals, which are still valid and worth to consider.

The first one is unity of effort. The multinational operations always require compromises from all sides, but unified leadership is a key part of the success. The Central Powers had difficulties with unified efforts. Both General Staffs had different approaches towards the end state. This conflict was not solved and led to a unilateral campaign. From today's perspective we can say, Erich von Falkenhayn's approach failed, but Conrad von Hötzendorf's approach might work. No one knows, but the half success of this campaign really depended on two stubborn leaders, who were not able to get a

good compromise. One additional experience to consider; a junior partner could have a better solution, than the senior one.

The second lesson learned is the combined arms as well as joint (Land and Sea) warfare. Mount Lovcen was a legend, an almost undefeatable fortress, called “the Gibraltar of the Adriatic.” The Austro-Hungarian forces took it in three days due to the excellent use of combined arms—infantry, artillery and naval gunfire. The Montenegrin artillery was defeated by the Austro-Hungarian heavy artillery and without artillery support the fall of the Montenegrin infantry’s positions was only question of time. The Austro-Hungarians used the aviation very effectively as well.

The third lesson learned is the agility. The Austro-Hungarian Navy executed excellent raids against Montenegrin and Albanian ports, but after the first combat losses they stopped. This passivity provided the safe evacuation of the Serbians. The war had the inseparable consequence, the losses. This maxim is forgotten sometimes in the modern societies. Everyone expect the zero casualties. Some countries ceased their participation in wars or in conflict zones due to their suffered casualties. These countries forgot this maxim and their soldiers left the war with defeat. It was the case on December 29th, 1915, when the Austro-Hungarian flotilla raided Durazzo and lost one torpedo destroyer in a minefield and a second one scuttled later in the battle. The battle was won; the task was executed, the flotilla returned back with no major damages in the remaining ships, and caused some on the Entente ships. The Austro-Hungarian navy released from command the flotilla commander and the surface fleet subordinate commanders lost their agility. This incident prevented the Austro-Hungarian Navy’s successful contributions to

this campaign. No navy or army can allow itself to lose its agility and ability to react. You must accept casualties.

The fourth lesson learned is the logistics and the preparations of the battlefield. As it was common in those times the field commanders prepared everything for breaking through, but after they faced the logistic difficulties which prevented them to take advantage on the situation on time. The Austro-Hungarian army prepared well for the Montenegrin operation and till the battle of Mount Lovcen everything went smoothly. The advance toward the Montenegrin rear had some difficulties, but the real problems started in North Albania. The road network did not exist, the waterways were not used due to the mines and the engineers needed a lot of time to provide enough mobility to the troops. The Austro-Hungarian troops clearly lacked the knowledge about the terrain and they advance became extremely slow due to their poor lines of communications. The knowledge about the terrain really paid off well in the battle of Mount Lovcen, but in the offensive you must be aware of the deep area's difficulties as well.

This almost forgotten episode of World War One had some serious considerations and warn us, studying the history could prevent to do the same mistakes again.

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